



## The City of Brass

*S.A. Chakraborty*

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## **The City of Brass** S.A. Chakraborty

Nahri has never believed in magic. Certainly, she has power; on the streets of 18th century Cairo, she's a con woman of unsurpassed talent. But she knows better than anyone that the trade she uses to get by—palm readings, zars, healings—are all tricks, sleights of hand, learned skills; a means to the delightful end of swindling Ottoman nobles.

But when Nahri accidentally summons an equally sly, darkly mysterious djinn warrior to her side during one of her cons, she's forced to accept that the magical world she thought only existed in childhood stories is real. For the warrior tells her a new tale: across hot, windswept sands teeming with creatures of fire, and rivers where the mythical marid sleep; past ruins of once-magnificent human metropolises, and mountains where the circling hawks are not what they seem, lies Daevabad, the legendary city of brass?a city to which Nahri is irrevocably bound.

In that city, behind gilded brass walls laced with enchantments, behind the six gates of the six djinn tribes, old resentments are simmering. And when Nahri decides to enter this world, she learns that true power is fierce and brutal. That magic cannot shield her from the dangerous web of court politics. That even the cleverest of schemes can have deadly consequences.

After all, there is a reason they say be careful what you wish for . . .

## **The City of Brass Details**

Date : Published November 14th 2017 by Harper Voyager

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Author : S.A. Chakraborty

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## From Reader Review The City of Brass for online ebook

### Lori says

It's like the *Star Wars* Prequel Trilogy.

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### Regan says

4.5

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### Will Byrnes says

It's time to polish that *special* lamp gathering webs in the attic, put a fine edge on your bladed weaponry, remind yourself of ancient tribal insults and outrages, dust off that list of wishes that is around here somewhere and vacuum your magic carpet. You are about to be transported.

“The Magic Carpet” (detail), 1880, by Apollinary Mikhaylovich Vasnetsov © State Art Museum, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia/Bridgeman Art Library

Nahri, our Aladdin here, is a twenty-year-old thief and con artist, working marks in 18th Century French-occupied Cairo. She has a gift for discerning medical maladies and another for treating them. She is adept at languages and at parting the unwary from their money. When she is called in to help deal with a 12-year-old girl who is possessed, she rolls her eyes and opts to have a bit of fun trotting out an old spell that has never worked before. The difference here is that she tries it in a language she seems to have known forever, but which no one else has ever heard. Turns out the girl really was possessed, by a particularly nasty entity, and turns out that Nahri’s little experiment summoned a very scary djinn. In a flash, the evil possessor spirit and a large number of its dead minions are on her like decay on a corpse. Thankfully, the djinn is there to save the day, with extreme prejudice. Thus begins a beautiful friendship.

Image from deviantart.net

The frustrated pursuers have made Cairo a no-go zone for Nahri, so she and the djinn, Dara (which is a small portion of his entire name) head for the place where people of his sort reside, the world capital of the magical races, Daevabad, the Brass City of the title.

From Bensozia - Illustration by Edmund Dulac for *Stories from the Arabian Nights*

To call Dara a hottie would be a bit of an understatement. Handsome? For sure. Incredibly powerful? Fierce in battle? Be afraid, be very afraid. Able to leap tall minarets in a single flying carpet? You betcha. As if that were not enough, he is literally a creature of fire, and emits actual smoke. You never had a friend like him.

Cairo may present imminent threats of death, but Daevabad is no prize either. Ancient tribal hatreds are kept at bay by a strong, and ruthless ruler. King Ghassan ibn Khader al Qahtani must contend not only with inter-tribal tensions, he must cope with a growing insurgency. (Think sundry Middle East rulers with tribally diverse populations.) There are many who feel that laws favoring purebloods are unjust, and want those of mixed Djinn-human blood, *shafit*, (think mudbloods) to be treated fairly. One of those happens to be the king's number two son. Ali is a very devout young (18) man. As second in line, he is destined to help his older brother, Muntadhir, rule, as, basically, the head of security. He is extremely adept at sword-fighting and has gained a good reputation among the other student-warriors at the Citadel, a military training school (not in South Carolina) where he has been living and training for some years. Dad would not be pleased were he to learn that junior was giving money to an organization that purports to offer civilian-only aid to shafit, but is also rumored to be involved in a more military form of activity. (Think Hamas)

**S.A. Chakraborty** - image from her site

Revolutionary tensions are on the rise, palace intrigues as well, as trust is something one could only wish for. One key question is where Nahri really came from, who is she, really? It matters. And what happened to the ancient tribe that was chosen by Suleiman himself to rule, way back when.

There are magic rings, flaming swords, strange beings of diverse sorts, plots, battles, large scale and small, plenty of awful ways to die, without that being done too graphically. And there is even a bit of interpersonal attraction. Did I mention Dara being smokin'? There is also some romantic tension between Nahri and Ali. Add in a nifty core bit of history centered on Suleiman.

One of the great strengths of *City of Brass* is the lode of historical knowledge the author brings to bear.

**It actually started not as a novel, but as sort of a passion project/exercise in world-building that I never intended to show a soul! I'm a big history buff and with *The City of Brass* I wanted to recreate some of the stunning worlds I'd read about while also exploring traditional beliefs about djinn. A bit contrary to Western lore, djinn are said to be intelligent beings similar to humans, created from smokeless fire and living unseen in our midst—a fascinating, albeit slightly frightening concept, this idea of creatures living silently among us, dispassionately watching the rise and fall of our various civilizations.** - from the Twinning for Books interview

**Zulfiqar** - image from mere-vision.com

Chakraborty, our Sheherezade here, fills us in on much of the history of how the djinn came to build their human-parallel world, offering not just what is, but how what *is* arose from what *was*.

**there's a djinn version of Baghdad's great library, filled with the ancient books humans have lost alongside powerful texts of magic; they battle with weapons from Achaemenid Persia (enhanced by fire of course); the medical traditions of famed scholars like Ibn Sina have been adapted to treat magical maladies; dancers conjure flowers while singing Mughal love songs; a court system based on the Zanzibar Sultanate deals justice to merchants who bewitch their competitors... not to mention a cityscape featuring everything from ziggurats and pyramids to minarets and stupas.** - from the Twinning for

## Books interview

There are a lot of names to remember, words to learn, tribes to keep straight, and allegiances to keep track of. I found myself wishing there was a list somewhere that helped keep it all straight, and “Poof!” there it appeared at the back of the book, a glossary, rich with useful information. It could have been a bit larger though. I would have liked for it to include a list of the djinn tribes, with information about each, their geographical bases, proclivities, languages, you know, stuff. The information can be found in the book itself, but it would have been nice to have had a handy short reference.

image from upstaged entertainment

*The City of Brass* is both very smart and very entertaining. The richness of the world we see here gives added heft to a wonderful story. The world Chakraborty has created hums with humanity, well, whatever the djinn equivalent might be for *humanity* (djinnity?). You will smell the incense, want to keep a damp cloth at hand to wipe the dust and sand from your face, and a cool drink nearby to help with the heat. It probably wouldn’t hurt to post a lookout in case someone decides to try spiking your drink or inserting a long blade into your back. This is a wonderful, engaging, and fun read. It will not take you a thousand and one nights to read, but you might prefer that it did. The only wish you will need when you finish reading *The City of Brass* is for Volume 2 of this trilogy, *The Kingdom of Copper*, to appear, NOW!!!

Review posted – July 28, 2017

Publication date – November 14, 2017

## =====EXTRA STUFF

Links to the author’s personal and Twitter pages

Interview - Twinning For Books

A link to a map with a key to the main places noted in the book

The M Word: Muslin Americans Take the Mic - a panel discussion including Chakraborty and two other Islamic women writers – hosted by Hussein Rashid

The City of Brass - from *Arabian Nights*, on Gutenberg

November 9, 2017 - *City of Brass* is among the nominees for Amazon's book of the year - Science Fiction and Fantasy

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**Melissa ♥ Dog/Wolf Lover ♥ Martin says**

**Update: \$1.99 kindle US today 5/16/18**

OMG! I got my stained, numbered, & signed edition of the book today. I'm addicted to these kinds of books. Look at the beauty!

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### **Roshani Chokshi says**

I just finished reading this by the dying light of my cellphone while small, devious looking insects clamored towards the light and attacked my face. I HAVE NO REGRETS. That is how spellbinding this book is...I could not put it down. I haven't had that kind of visceral "No one touch this book, it is actually a clever extension of my hand, and I will BITE you if you come between me and these characters" reaction in awhile. Chakraborty has some truly dazzling worldbuilding skills, but beyond that, she crafts remarkable characters who are achingly real and complex. I loved their interactions. The writing was just nonstop intoxicating atmosphere, and the plot was riveting. This is the UPROOTED, EMBER IN THE ASHES, WRATH AND THE DAWN mashup of my FREAKING DREAMS. I am going to be throwing this book at people when it releases in November!!!!

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### **\*?Nani\*? says**

3.5??

#### **? The long-overdue review finally posted.?**

This could and *would* have been a 5-star read for me had it not been for that incredibly slow start all the way through almost the end of the book.

The first half was very much foundational which introduced us to the world, the characters, as well as the inner workings and machinations of the city of Brass. Obviously, this is highly appreciated but I don't think we needed to spend the entire three-quarters of the book just getting introduced to things. I get bored easily as it is.????

So, I'm torn. I still don't know if I'm happy or angry at this book. Initially, I rated it 4.5 stars (purely for the ending) but I don't think spending almost the entirety of the book bored or confused only to get an explosive ending is a reason enough to be this generous so, I took it down a notch to 3.5 stars.

At first glance, this novel was everything I dreamt of, a Middle Eastern folklore. I'm a sucker for Eastern and Asian folklore and as someone who's always had a soft spot for anything related to Egypt (I'm not Egyptian incase you think I'm being biased. I just really love the country, its rich history and the people in general), I was so thrilled that I couldn't even wait for the book to be released in the UK (which will be in March), so I ordered my copy from the US. That's how badly I wanted to immerse myself in what I'd initially thought would be a magical time travel back to 18th-Century Cairo. Let me give you some pointers, here:

? A MC who's a con artist and gets caught up in one of her cons.

? A Djinn warrior with a mysterious past.

? Djinns who can be loyal or deceitful as the occasion demands; ghouls who rise from the grave to devour the living; Mythical and terrifying creatures that fly through the air.

? Monsters who dwell in the water and kill both djinns and humans.

? Flying carpets. Shape-shifters. Clan warfare. Personal ambitions. Power politics. Racial and religious tensions.

All culminating in a cataclysmic showdown in a legendary city protected by magical brass.

Now, please tell me if that doesn't sound like the kind of book you'd want to devour in a single day.

### **? Let's start off with the plot:**

Although the book was filled with action-packed scenes with a good amount of storytelling information, which made for somewhat of a rich reading experience, it all came in too little too late.

All of the excitement was sprung upon us toward the very last few pages when by then, the reader (or maybe just myself) was already too exhausted over the slow beginning and middle parts. I mean, Nahri doesn't even make it to Daevebad until after we're way past the first half of the book.

Another source of disappointment for me was the political aspects and the inner workings of Daevabad. The rules and organization of this world became so overwhelming at points that I had to go back and re-read some parts to really understand what was going on. Some, I still don't.

And if you've read some of my reviews in the past, you know that a heavy dose of political intrigue in fantasy is my Achilles heel. I genuinely get weak in the knees for books with that aspect and the fact that I couldn't get behind this particular world was heartbreaking and discouraging. The frustration alone almost made me quit because I felt like I was reading with my eyes closed.

I still don't know the difference between a Daeva and a djinn!

### **Now onto the characters:**

#### **? Nahri:**

Oh, dear. Nahri and I started out with a bang then took a serious dive down, out of which neither of us made it alive.

The book has two perspectives, one of which is Nahri, who, at the beginning was primarily the kind of MC I love to read about. She was sharp-tongued, independent and a likeable con artist, who makes her living on the streets of Cairo by swindling nobles and also has the ability to sense illness in others and to heal some ailments. I mean, right!?

I felt an instant personal connection to her because, well, growing up, some kids dream of becoming a doctor or whatever but ever since I was a kid and watched some unfortunate TV show (or a movie that ruined all other dreams for me), all I'd wanted to become was a con artist. I proudly admit my childhood dream.

Everything about it looked and sounded appealing (in the eyes of a child, through the TV screen, I suppose), pulling off one unforgettable con after another, living off your wits and charm etc... sadly, I had neither the wit nor the charm to pull anything off and had to settle for a normal childhood. So, obviously this was my chance to live vicariously through Nahri and I jumped on that wagon faster than a speeding bullet.

She started out so well. She was a survivor; clever and mischievous, making decisions with her head rather

than her heart, who'd do what needed to be done to make it through another day and though not all her decisions could be labelled as sound, they were necessary nonetheless. I appreciated that so much, after all, who isn't a sucker for a survivor story?

All that went straight in the bin toward the end. As the plot finally progressed, her character basically regressed. Page after page she kept making one foolish decision after another which was so unlike her, as if the Nahri at the beginning of the novel transformed into a completely different character by the end.

All that pride I felt at the start was crushed to pieces as she became a great source of disappointment when the book ended. It was very disheartening and I am not pleased.

### **? Prince Alizayd:**

The second perspective is told through Ali. As with Nahri, Ali, the benevolent second son of the current king, who will never inherit the throne but wants desperately to make amends to those he thinks his people have wronged, starts out remarkably and takes a tumble down in the end. As things were finally moving along, both Ali and Nahri's actions became so infuriating that I started rooting for whatever monster was the talk of the town to knock some sense into them or, more accurately, to just ingest them and be done with it.

### **? Dara:**

My favourite character from beginning to end was Dara. The “frighteningly beautiful,” kidnapper/rescuer Djin who becomes Nahri’s saviour after she gets caught up in one of her cons and ends up being pursued by a monster or Djin of some sort (I’m still confused as to who’s who in this novel).

And as luck would have it, he knows the answer to the mystery of Nahri’s origins, who’s a Shafit, a descendant of a half-magical tribe, thought to have become extinct.

Thus, in an effort to save her, the mysterious protector and Nahri embark on a journey to the city of Daevabad, which’s where their adventure begins.

I loved everything about Dara. I was intrigued by him from the moment he entered the picture and as the plot advanced and his mysterious yet tragic past slowly started to unravel, I sympathised with him, rooted for him and quite literally, he became the reason I wanted to finish the book.

All in all, it was a fun-ish read but no minds were blown here. I loved it for the sole reason that it shifted the centre away from western myths, with a strong conclusion and a craftily set up epilogue. I'll give credit where credit is due, the epilogue was incredible.

The author combines some of the plot’s surprises with vivid prose and evens out the action with wry humour but with enough material that was already at hand, it could've been leveraged to turn it into an even more of an epic read with non-stop adventures.

Maybe with the next one.

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### **Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says**

**\$1.99 Kindle sale, May 16, 2018.**

Final review, first posted on Fantasy Literature:

Nahri, a young woman living alone in 18th century Cairo, gets by doing minor cons, fake healing rituals and a little theft. She knows nothing about her parents or heritage but, in addition to being able to diagnose disease in others with a glance and occasionally truly heal them, her own body automatically heals of injuries almost instantly and she has the magical ability to understand ? and speak ? any language.

Nahri's life gets upended when she accidentally summons Darayavahoush, a fiery, handsome djinn warrior, to her side while performing a sham healing ceremony. After he gets over his murderous rage at being involuntarily summoned, Dara saves Nahri from murderous ifrit and ghouls who have become aware of Nahri and her abilities. Dara quickly enchants a magic carpet and, dragging along the reluctant Nahri, he flees with her toward Daevabad, the legendary city of brass inhabited by magical djinn (or, more properly, daeva). But there are warring political factions in Daevabad among the six different djinn tribes, and appalling mistreatment of the mixed-blood, partly human underclass of shafits. Nahri and Dara each have trouble that may await them there in Daevabad, for different reasons.

The chapters of *The City of Brass* (2017), S.A. Chakraborty's debut fantasy novel based on Middle Eastern mythology, alternate between two characters' points of view: Nahri, the feisty young con artist with a mysterious magical heritage, and Prince Alizayd al Qahtani, the second son of the ruler of Daevabad. Ali is a rather tightly wound but honorable young warrior with a mixed heritage himself, has sympathy for those who are mistreated. But in trying to secretly (and illegally) fund needed educational and medical services for the oppressed shafits, he may be stirring up even more trouble.

Chakraborty, who spent years studying Middle Eastern history and developing the magical world in which this story is set, has created a vibrant and exotic setting in *The City of Brass*. (There's a helpful glossary at the end of the book that defines some of the Middle Eastern terminology and magical beings). Some of the setting details are memorable, like the palace in Daevabad that mourns its missing founding family, the Nahids. The gardens are an untamed wilderness, stairs go missing, water in fountains frequently turns to blood. When Nahri, a lost member of the Nahid family, arrives in the city, the palace magically begins to spiff itself up. In this exotic setting, Chakraborty examines some timeless human issues, like prejudice, torn loyalties, and the effect of violence on a person's heart.

*The City of Brass* has a fast-paced beginning that sucks the reader right in, as Nahri and Dara flee through the desert toward Daevabad, pursued by deadly enemies, and develop a relationship based on equal parts irritation and attraction. Once they reach Daevabad, the great city of brass, the plot slows down and gets a little muddled. There are too many competing factions and conflicts: between pureblood djinn and shafits, between the different djinn tribes and other magical elementals, and between those who support the currently ruling Qahtani family and those who are intent on bringing back Nahid rule, using Nahri.

Additionally, there are conflicts within the hearts of each of the main characters. Dara isn't really certain he wants to take Nahri to Daevabad, where capture or death may be his fate, and where his violent past, which still haunts him, may catch up to him. Nahri isn't at all convinced she wants to go there either; she rather liked her life as it was, and she doesn't intend to be anyone's pawn. And Prince Ali is caught between warring factions and loyalties, trying to balance both.

“You won't be able to continue like this, Alizayd,” he warned. “To keep walking a path between loyalty to your family and loyalty to what you know is right. ... Because on the day of your judgment, Alizayd ... when you're asked why you didn't stand up for what you knew was just ...” He paused, his next words finding Ali's heart like an arrow. “Loyalty to your family

won't excuse you."

It's a conflict-driven plot, with both physical violence and subtler conspiring and conniving. While some of the more tangential factions and contentions are hazy in their nature and motivations, overall *The City of Brass* is a compelling read. Chakraborty won back my enthusiasm with a rousing game-changer of an ending. I didn't even care that it was a cliffhanger! Now I'm anxiously awaiting the next book in THE DAEVABAD TRILOGY, *The Kingdom of Copper*, expected to be published in 2018.

*The City of Brass*, while it isn't being marketed as a young adult fantasy, has crossover qualities. It has two younger main characters and, despite the web of conflicts, it's written in a fairly straightforward style. It's likely to appeal to older teenagers as well as many adults.

Totally tangential issue: I've seen this book praised for being #ownvoices. While it's true that S.A. Chakraborty is Muslim, she's a convert to that faith. She's originally from New Jersey and of Irish Catholic heritage. Personally I don't think it matters; she's clearly immersed herself in this culture and done a lot of study, and if she wants to call herself S.A. rather than Shannon and write about Middle Eastern mythology even if it's not her heritage or race, I don't have any issue with it as long as she (and other authors) do that thoughtfully and after doing a due amount of homework. We should judge this book on its own merits, not because of who the author is or isn't.

*I received a free copy of this book from the publisher through Edelweiss. Thanks!!*

Content notes: A fair amount of violence that might be disturbing to some readers, discussion of sexual and other types of slavery, scattered F-bombs. Personally I wouldn't recommend it for the younger teens or preteens.

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### **Cait • A Page with a View says**

This is an AMAZING debut and definitely one of the best adult fantasy books I've found. I wish there were more fast-paced, creative, *fun* stories like this that feature 20-something characters! The world was absolutely gorgeous & vivid, the characters were all strong, and the writing was great... everything flowed so well.

(PS - some readers often ask, so just a heads up that there's a lot about demons & possession in this story).

And this isn't necessarily about the story, but I'm so glad I waited for the UK hardcover because EVERYTHING about it is stunning. Even the deckled pages & paper weight, ok...

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### **Robin Hobb says**

As always, I want to let others know that I received this book as a gift from my publishers. In this instance, I have not met the author, but hope that at some time I will.

Do you remember the first time a book took you out of your culture? I think for most of us it happens in childhood. For me, my passage to other countries and times came in the form of fairy tales and legends. We had a fat volume of Arabian Nights (most likely edited for kids) with lavish line illustrations. That was my

first introduction to Sinbad the Sailor and Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp and many other wonderful tales. And it was my first introduction to Genies, as they were spelled in that wonderful book.

When I ventured into City of Brass, it was like stepping back into that wonderful confusion one feels when one ventures into an 'exotic' (not your own) culture. This was not my magic, not my wondrous beings and creatures.

Nahri was the perfect guide to take me into this story. She is the 'outsider' in the tale, the person with a nebulous past and a precarious future. A thief, a con artist and a charlatan, she tempts fate when she inadvertently dabbles in an older, deeper magic.

And that is as close to a spoiler as I'm going to get. Fantasy is rich in many flavor; in fantasy, we are all citizens of the magical worlds. Step in and enjoy this one.

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**may ☺ says**

***Full review FINALLY posted***

Every time I think about this book and how excited I was to read it and how it caused me the biggest disappointment of my life I laugh through my tears bc wHY WAS I EXPECTING ANYTHING LESS

Im aware ^ sentence made no sense but im really fragile and vulnerable and sad right now also it took me like 3 weeks to read this book ??? so I also feel scammed. I want a refund my time and tears.

i'm terribly sad to be writing such a review because i had SO MUCH HIGH hopes for this book. le sigh.

Okay, so this is slightly hilarious but I before I read this tragedy, I wrote a pre-review of sorts gushing my heart out about how proud and honoured I was to see an #OwnVoice muslim+/middle eastern fantasy so well celebrated in the YA community (don't get me wrong, I still am **SO HAPPY** to see such diversity become a more common occurrence) but LIKE AT THAT POINT I WAS WILLING TO 5 STAR IT ON THAT BASIS ONLY I DIDN'T KNOW THE PAIN AND DISAPPOINTMENT THAT WAS IN STORE FOR ME :')

(s)

Onto the review tho...

**Pros**

- MUSLIM+/MIDDLE EASTERN FANTASY
- Ummmmmmmmmmmm
- The world building ?? it's complex and ish
- Alizayd. He's my little bean.
- There were some moments that were semi-funny and I half laughed and then dissolved into a puddle of disappointment
- The ENDING was actually more exciting than the entire 500 prior pages but didn't make up for all my time

and effort wasted

- That's all I can think of :(

### Cons

- I tried to like nahri bc she's like this girl going against all odds but she annoyed me a lot and the way she acts. Shes so standoff-ish and fake about her religion, its like she's just muslim by name bc she literally gives zero regard for any Islamic guidelines or principles and ughghghghghghhhh. Shes just so afjdsakfas

- **EVERYONE GIVES ALIZAYD CRAP FOR ACTUALLY PRACTISING ISLAMIC LAWS FRICK OFF THANKS**

- I get that theyre supposed to be in some //morally corrupt// society but COME ON why the heck do all the ones who give two craps about their religion always have to be deemed "boring, naïve, blind follower etc. etc." yeesh let people live their lives

- **ACTUALLY** I feel like THE ISLAMIC aspect wasn't EVEN NECESSARY to the story bc personally, it fell really flat and I can see how it would be confusing and maybe even counter-productive for people who aren't well read in the faith. If it was just kept as a Middle Eastern rep, I probably would have liked it better.

- Because like what's the point of having a muslim fantasy if I don't even feel represented :| the world shall never know

the actual story aspects ...

- Its so dense

- Its so hard to read

- The world building is so....complex it actually crossed over into the line of "complicated" and overshadows ANYTHING ELSE

- Its confusing. Oh, so, very, confusing.

- Legit no one knows whats happening or why its happening or for what reason

- Basically just info-dumping info on the world and politics and Arabian mythology

- But where is the plot you ask?? Missing.

- **THE ROMANCE KILL ME NOW**

- **FOR MORE THAN THE FIRST HALF OF THE BOOK ITS JUST ABOUT DARA AND NAHRI ANGRY FLIRTING IN THE DESERT BYEBYE BYEBYE BYEBYE BYEBY**

- I literally felt like the romance was the only thing occurring besides the info dumping how sad

- **NAHRI'S KISSING WEIRD DEVIL GUYS AFTER KNOWING HIM FOR TWO SECONDS WHAT DID I DO TO DESERVE THIS**

- And then there are creeping signs of a love triangle and I was just curled up in a ball shrieking

- Dara is a piece of poop :) I liked him for 0.45 seconds and then arrogance and idiocy flooded out of his pores and I died

- I

- WAS

- SO

- BORED

- Also I've diagnosed that nahri is suffering from a very terrible case of Special Snowflake Syndrome :( how tragic

- I probably missed a whole lot of ish that I initially wanted to rant about but oh well.

Also, these are my opinions okay don't @ me please, im smol.

On a more positive note, the best part of the book for me was the acknowledgements, it literally warmed my heart and I wish Chakraborty the best in her future works even if I won't be continuing with this series oops

1.5 stars!

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**Buddy read** with gluten free & saunta & pink polka-dot cat ears & the blog queen

i just have one thing to say, ahem

**MUSLIMS**

**IN**

**FANTASTY**

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

---

**Em says**

I can tally my life in good days and bad days, and thanks to this book, this turned out to be a very bad day.

I'm less of a person and more of a physical manifestation of how much this book disappointed me. It's like my personality has been factory reset and all I want now is to go out into an empty field and scream for about an hour and generally just give in to the brief privilege of hating myself for harboring so many expectations.

I really can't wait to not be let down by every single one of my most anticipated books. I'm very excited for that time to come whenever that may be.

#### **What is this book about?**

Nahri is living in what appears to be 18th-century Cairo, earning her money as a fortune-teller, a con artist and a leader of zars (rituals for the exorcism of evil spirits), dwelling on her ability to sense illness in others and to heal some ailments, speaking a language that she inherited from her long-dead parents and that was as unknowable to her as it was to anyone else, and generally hiding from the many questions about herself and her upbringing that she needed to stare down.

Her carefully crafted, if precarious, routine is shattered when Nahri walks through Cairo's cemetery tailing a possessed young girl she's tried to help, only to be chased herself by Ifrits (ghoulish zombies). Nahri is rescued by the intervention of Dara, a djinn, who tells her that she's the only remaining descendent of an ancient half-human, half-magical tribe of healers and promises to take her to the eponymous city of brass, Daevabad, where she will get the answers to all her unasked questions.

And so begins Nahri's entanglement in a world of Islamic mythology and lore, landing herself in a city on a knife's edge, and in the middle of a political conflict stretching back to the time of Suleiman (or Solomon). Concurrently, the book also follows the youngest son of Daevabad's king, Alizayd, who opposes his family's unjust treatment of the shafits — the half djinn, half human population — who are forced to live in horrible conditions, while the pureblood djinn gorge on the city's resources, power, and freedom.

Reading this book seemed like a good idea but so was boarding the titanic and look what happened there. It

was the equivalent of taking a nap, the cruellest kind of temptation: it promises you rest and wellness but leaves you with a cloudy headache and an inescapable drowsiness the rest of the day.

**The first issue is the pacing:** Nahri doesn't make it to Daevebad until about halfway through the book and by that point I was beginning to wonder: if I *sigh* loudly enough will this plot stop dragging? A problem conflated by the fact that there are approximately 3 million various groups of magical peoples and different political and cultural divides – which made it very easy to disengage with the story and lose the thread of the plot, and very difficult to care enough to flip to the glossary every single time. The political framework was employed with an odd detachment, creating a fablelike distance from what was supposed to be a grisly, shocking climax. Not to mention the fact that it was so confusing I had a headache so strong I swear I could sense Lord Voldemort. I honestly felt like I was actively crushing my last remaining brain cells just trying to figure out who's allies with whom, what are their motivations, why are they all so obsessed with war, what about just going to sleep.

But what really kicked me out of this book was the characters. There are literally only like, two people in this 500-pages book whom I would hang out with for more than three or four hours without wanting to strangle them. It's disappointing because for the first third of the book, the very dry action was leavened with their humor, which earned this book bankable reputation that it later spent slumming it for the rest 350 pages. And now I'm left looking at the characters as I would an old friend that I sometimes miss but always remember why I had to cut them off, knowing I'm better off now than before.

First, **Dara**. I emotionally and physically cannot stand him. He's a nail raked over the chalkboard of my nerves.

Here's the thing: I'm of the firm belief that a great character does not necessarily translate into a "good person". In fact, some of the best literary figures are completely horrible people, and that's because a character's worth should always be hinged on how interesting and complex they are, not on their morality in case they were real. But you know what? Male protagonists whose arc revolves around growth and actual personality will always be more interesting than insufferable wankers who punch everything and treat everyone around them like garbage.

Dara's character lacks any creativity, emotion, or purpose beyond carrying on a pointless ancestral grudge. It's impossible to sympathize with him, let alone root for him.

Even more unfathomable is cheering for his relationship with Nahri which was dangerously teetering on the edge of "abusive", to be honest. Nahri is pretty much stuck in a relationship with the personification of a blackhole who never considers the fact that she's a person and not an attention machine he can neglect until it suits him to remind himself of her existence. How am I supposed to believe he "cares for her" when he clearly only loves himself through her in the most selfish of ways and keeps leeching off her energy for his own egotistical purposes?

And even worse, Nahri continuously puts substantial effort into pleasing him for no reason other than that she feels like she owes him the benefit of the doubt after saving her life and bringing her to Daevabad, even when it was at the expense of everyone else. She's allowed him to turn her into a secondary character in the story of her own life – by coaxing and pleading and enduring for this "relationship", while he sits there, absolutely uncaring about her opinions and have all his sordid emotional whims (voiced or unvoiced) catered to. It didn't even seem as if Nahri cared enough to form thoughts of her own, only flitting between her own half-hearted suspicions and whatever half-truths he pushed down her throat, and that only made the slide toward resenting her quiet and fast.

*“I can take care of myself.”*

*“But you don’t need to,” Dara replied, sounding annoyed. “Nahri, did you not hear what I just said? Let others play politics. Stay away from these princes. They are beneath you anyway.”*

I was honestly mentally crafting incredibly angry speeches in my head by that point. I wanted to shake her. I was just a smoldering glove of bitterness flying through space right then (and I still am).

Lastly, any book that’s advertised as a Muslim inspired fantasy novel is inviting high expectations. However, in a community that is depicted as largely Muslim, Alizayd was the only character who was remotely portrayed as being so.....**only he was ostracized on account of being Muslim by pretty much EVERYONE ELSE.**

Ali is a pious, self-serious and kind-hearted scholar, trying to understand his own privilege and to balance exercising his own power with the love he has for his powerful family. Yet he was perceived, by everyone else, as an *oddity* for simply being devout – for declining his brother’s invitation to drink alcohol, for frequenting parties, etc. He was even called a “religious fanatic”, a fallacious claim that was unwarranted, and worst of all, **left unchallenged or called out by the author.**

I’m not saying that every Muslim is as pious as Ali and as intent on following Islam’s laws, because that is simply not true. Like any other religion, the levels of faith differentiate from a person to another: it depends on every individual’s social world, their politics, the way that they see their communities, the way they see themselves. And that diversity amongst the Muslims themselves is a welcome representation **but it was far from being an accurate one in this case:** piousness and pure intentions would never serve as a reason to be shunned and belittled in your own Muslim community—and especially not by the majority.

This is my issue with Islam representation in the mainstream media. If Islam isn’t negatively framed and portrayed as a violent religion, then it’s reduced to five-time prayers and a dress code and Halal vs. Haram... when it’s so much *more*.

The beauty of Islam lives in your conduct and your character and your manners. Islam is kindness in the face of hostility, love in the face of anger, charity in the face of poverty, calmness amidst troubles and overwhelming reliance on God. Islam is how giving some water to a thirsty homeless animal can wipe out all your past sins. Islam is how birds and animals eating from plants you grow in your garden is a charity. Islam is how a compassionate touch on an orphan’s head is appreciated by God. Islam is how a smile and a kind word are praised. Islam is how putting a morsel in your wife’s mouth is a righteous deed. Islam is how cherishing your own family is a charity. Islam is how honoring your parents is highly rewarded and estimated. Islam is how even your pains, physical and emotional, great and small, are all counted and compensated. Because nothing is wasted, nothing is meaningless.

This is the nature of Islam. It’s a way of life that revolves around goodness of the heart and having pure intentions. It’s not merely putting a hijab on or praying five times a day, but to (simply) be a kind, righteous person who spreads peace, forgiveness, love and justice wherever we are. This is the Islam I grew up being taught. This is my religion. **This is the representation I long to see.**

Overall, this book was a disappointment. The only reason I’m giving it an extra star is because there was a very brief portion of it that I wish I could steal with the photoshop eyedropper tool and expand into a full book of its own.

## may ✌️ says

The feeling you get when one of your most anticipated books lives up to your expectations is one of the best. It's the contentment that you feel about not hating everything you read. It's the peacefulness that you feel knowing that you actually *can* like books. And most of all, it's the excited feeling of finally NOT being crushed by overwhelming disappointment that a book turned out to be as good as you thought it was.

Unfortunately, **The City of Brass** did not give me ANY of those feelings whatsoever!!

In fact, I had to **DNF the book at page 353** because I found that I'd stopped caring about... 353 pages ago. This was after 19 DAYS of trying extremely hard to find a sliver of motivation, a tiny piece that would make me like (or even just *tolerate*) this book and keep going. (Tbh it was probably just 14 days and then another 5 days of not reading but still pretending like I actually cared enough to finish.)

But nope!! None of that happened!! Somehow I sinned, and some entity thinks that my first one-star read of the year should also be the book I mentally five-starred and expected to become one of my favorites. I feel like someone just held out a chocolate-chip cookie to me and said I could have it, only to snatch it away from me when I reach for it. WHO DOES THAT.

### ? THE WRITING... AKA “A STRAW IS MORE INTERESTING THAN THIS”

My main problem with this book was the writing. I swear, **the writing was the equivalent of every single time I almost fell asleep in class** because I was SO. BORED. It was extremely dry and dense and even harder to get through than a standardized test you take for four hours and all the black text starts swimming in front of your eyes. I honestly felt so emotionally drained from just opening the book sometimes that I didn't even have the energy to close it????

Like I get how some people could see it as beautiful, or amazing, or whatever glowing compliments they have to serve it. But... y'all it was so boring that I didn't even finish reading one page before getting distracted by the straw in my mouth and moving it around for at least five minutes and then realizing that I wasn't reading anymore, trying to read, and giving up after I read two pages.

It was a STRAW. A straw was more entertaining this book. I bet I could've swallowed that straw and it would still hurt less than reading this, jesus christ!!!

I mean, there were **literal 300-WORD ESSAYS on what simple objects or rooms looked like**. It described what a throne looked like in approximately 51038746 words??? That's 5102938744 WORDS TOO MANY—you could literally say “the throne” and I'd imagine a throne. That's it. That's all it takes. Two words. You could even just describe it in ONE word, “throne”, and I'd still be able to imagine a throne!! Wow!!!

Listen, if I can't keep my attention on one page because of excessive descriptions, **how do you expect me to pay attention for the rest of the book??** I lost my focus, empathy, and any willpower to live about 300 pages ago, unfortunately.

*To be fair this is all really just personal preference but I really could not click with the writing style at all and my experience was GREAT...ly affected in a way that made it impossible to actually read and enjoy the book.*

### **? PLOT & CHARACTERS, WHICH WERE, SURPRISE, BORING**

What made the dry-dense-makes-me-want-to-die writing even WORSE was that for like the first 50% of the book, all Nahri and Dara were doing was roaming around in the desert. Doing nothing, except flirting but pretending they didn't like each other because it's FORBiDDeN. **Are we really still pretending like we care?? In this economy???**

And tbh the whole premise was a very generic fantasy plot. The mythology made it different and more interesting, but it's basically just a fancy version of: girl discovers she is Speshul and has mAGiCaL POWeRs—takes an eternity to travel to the place of Speshul People—falls in love with someone on the way because yes of course there has to be romance even when the characters have absolutely no chemistry—[insert other generic fantasy plot events that happened because I gave up after that]

**The characters were all very meh.** Nahri and Ali were both quite bland and didn't really have any character traits. Like you know paper? That blank white thin sheet of nothing? That's exactly what reminds me of them. And while Dara wasn't the BEST character, at least he had an actual, you know, personality. **And he roasted Ali so that was extremely entertaining.**

(Also I realize I didn't introduce who the characters were at all but I literally Do Not Care, and I definitely Do Not Feel Obliged To Give Any More Of My Energy For The Sake Of This Book. So just trust me when I say they are, uhhhh, not worth my time writing or your time reading. You can thank me later when you DNF this book at page one.)

### **? WORLDBUILDING (OR AS I LIKE TO CALL IT, CONFUSED NICK YOUNG)**

And my final complaint is the worldbuilding. **I actually found the whole Daeva world super interesting, but unfortunately, I had no idea what was going on.** Apparently there are Daeva, who are also called djinn, but some Daeva aren't called djinn and I only know WHY from another person's review???. And then there are different Daeva tribes all over the continent, but there's one specific tribe that's called Daeva, and there's nothing to differentiate the tribe and the species as a whole??

I mean, I might be stupid (I am) but the worldbuilding confused me so much. And it also was literally DUMPED onto the reader in the first hundred pages, plus all the historical context and cultural background. The whole experience can be easily compared to sitting on the toilet for too long that you get pins and needles, and when you try to walk, you almost fall over from the sudden pain that erupts in your feet that you didn't ask for because you just wanted to pee!!!

### **? THE ONLY PROS**

- ownvoices Muslim rep!!! in fantasy!!!! which is so so important!!!! (I can't comment on the rep so I recommend you read May's ownvoices review!)

- beautiful brown characters!!
- it is set in the Middle East!!
- a hijabi is on the cover!!
- okay that's it

Anyways, my favorite emotion is crippling disappointment, so I'm glad I got to experience that with this book!! I'm now going to take a one-way trip to Antarctica to live with the penguins because I'm emotionally exhausted from all the effort it took me to read this without compensation, and even if penguins smell horrible, **they'll never let me down like this book did!!!**

*Little quick disclaimer because I'm paranoid!!! I realize I was a bit... harsh with this book. But honestly if you want to read, read it!! I think it's an important book, especially concerning rep!! But I'm extremely salty over this and the only way to get my salt out is to uhhhh roast things.*

// failed **buddy read** with the fav fake & oldie & pretty p\*ni

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### **Warda says**

Edit: I've decided to not go back to this book.

For one, I realised how relieved I felt when I decided to quit on it.

Second, I would stop mid-sentence and paragraph several times.

Third, I do not think I'll be missing out on greatness if I don't read it. ?

Farewell, book. We broke up for good.

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So, this took a turn. ?

I want to blame the book. I think I will blame the book. But this could also very well be that I haven't been in the mood to read fantasy books in forever.

So I'm putting a stop to this before it puts me in a slump, since I was getting more and more reluctant to read it.

God knows when I'll pick it up. If I ever do that is.

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Expecting great things from this Muzlamic book. I've already up in my feelings by seeing words like *hijab*, *fajr* and *abaya*!

Leggo!

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### **Sana says**

on hold, whoops

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## Melanie says

*ARC provided by Harper Voyager in exchange for an honest review.*

*The City of Brass* was unlike any Fantasy novel I've read before, and I completely adored it. This debut novel is easily one of the best books I've read in 2017, and I will sing its praises even after its release on November 14th, 2017. Please guys, don't sleep on this story, because it has not received the hype it deserves.

This is the first book in an own voices Muslim Fantasy series, that walks the line between Young Adult and Adult, and switches between two very different points of view. One point of view is a girl in her early twenties, who remembers nothing of her childhood, and is living near Cairo, Egypt. Her name is Nahri and she is a street healer by day, and a con-woman and thief by night. Nahri has a natural affinity for healing people, and can magically see what the problem is. Sometimes she can wish it away, other times it is not so easy. Many people realize Nahri's talents and believe her magic to also work spiritually, which is why she gets hired a lot to cleanse and heal people at Zar Ceremonies, where she leads dances and prayers to be rid of demons/ifrits, which she doesn't believe in.

Our story truly starts at a Zar Ceremony where Nahri is doing the steps she normally does while really just putting on a show to get paid at the end of the night, except this time she actually does feel something after an old song is sung. After a turn of events, Nahri ends up in a cemetery where she begins to pray and accidentally summons a **djinn** daeva warrior.

And Dara isn't just any daeva warrior. He is the best warrior to have ever lived, and he has a very tormented past, because, let's be real, what brooding male protagonist doesn't? Dara soon realizes that Nahri isn't completely human, and that ifrits will soon be after both of them. He then tells her about a city that is hidden behind brass walls, that will completely keep them safe from said ifrits.

We get to see our second point of view, which is from a young djinn prince named Ali, who lives in the magical hidden city of Daevabad. In Daevabad Ali's brother, Muntadhir, is the promised king, even though their father, Ghassan, currently rules, and Ali is training to become what his brother needs him to be once he takes the throne. I loved Ali's selflessness and his unconditional love for his family, because in this world, Ali will never marry or have children, but will be groomed to serve and protect Muntadhir with his life. Ali is completely okay with what is promised of his life, and he completely dedicates his life to God. Yet, with devoting his life to God, he starts to see the unfair treatment among the citizens.

People in this world can use magic, including humans, even though there are different ways, kinds, and extremes. This is a historical novel set in our time in the early 1800s, which barely touches upon the Ottoman Empire. Yet, we do get to briefly see how some of the Turkish people treated the Egyptians, and we even get to see some French Soldiers. I'm getting off topic, but basically what I'm trying to say is that even though this is for sure a fantasy novel, it ties in with our real world, and this makes humans a key part of this story.

- **Beings of Earth** - Humans.
- **Beings of Water** - Marid (water elementals).
- **Beings of Air** - Peri, Rukh, Shedu (all flying creatures).
- **Beings of Fire** - Daevas, Djinns, Ifrit.

With all these beings, come different powers and abilities. I loved this fantastical element and it truly made this story feel so whimsical. Also, Dijnns and daevas are the same, but “daeva” is an ancient term that means fire elementals, and after a war was over, everyone started calling themselves the human word for “daeva” which is “djinn”. But many people hold on to their daeva roots, since they have very different roles in Daevabad. Also, there are six tribes. But our dear Nahri though, is something completely different, very rare, and very sought after.

But ultimately this is a story about oppression, and what it means to believe that your blood is more pure than someone else. The mixed bloods in this world, shafits, are treated horribly and without a second thought. They are killed for crimes they didn’t commit, just to make the pure bloods feel safer. They aren’t allowed even close to the same luxuries pure bloods are, but they aren’t even allowed significant food or any medical treatment. Their children are stolen and sold away, most the time as working slaves or pleasure slaves. This story can feel so very real at times and, in my opinion, S.A. Chakraborty writes this systemic oppression beautifully to mirror our world today.

*“It’s not just a word [...] That slur has been used to demonize our tribe for centuries. It’s what people spit when they rip off our women’s veils and beat our men. It’s what the authorities charge us with whenever they want to raid our homes and seize our property.”*

Yeah, this is a pretty powerful book for many reasons. The only negative thing I can really say about it is that I felt somewhat like I was being queerbaited. Like, I was very unsure of Ali’s sexuality, because a few of his observations made me feel like he wasn’t straight by any means. I thought this was going to be addressed, but it just lead to a very anticlimactic and saddening death of a very minor side character, who had the promise for so much more. And then, once I got to the epilogue I was surprised to see something else that I would also borderline call queerbaiting, but hopefully she will address that in the next book in this series. Plus, maybe it’s just me reading things through my queer-tinted-glasses, and/or maybe we will get some awesome bisexual representation in book two!

Besides that, this is such a beautiful Middle Eastern story, that ties in so much of the culture’s folklore in an absolutely beautiful and seamless way. I completely recommend with my whole heart. I loved it and I couldn’t put it down. And the cover? Goosebumps.

This is the diverse fantasy novel I’ve been searching for. The fantasy world needs more diverse stories like this, and the world needs to see the diverse stories can be easily consumed and loved and, most importantly, worth buying. Everyone in this story is beautifully brown, we get to see some of these characters interact in mosques, we get to see our main character wearing a headscarf. I mean, I don’t think I’ve ever read a fantasy novel with these minor elements that are real life for so many readers. And this story is so amazing and so very beautifully written, too. I cannot wait to get my hands on The Kingdom of Copper in 2018!

I loved *The City of Brass* and it is one of the best author debuts I’ve ever read in my entire life. But I will say, the ending of this book ripped my heart out three times, so be prepared for that. This story was amazing, the characters are beyond words, the prose is exceptional, and the messages and representation are so very important. This book is heartfelt and powerful. Please give this a try come November 14th, 2017.

**Trigger Warnings** for graphic violence, human trafficking, rape, slavery, and war.

*The quote above was taken from an ARC and is subject to change upon publication.*

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