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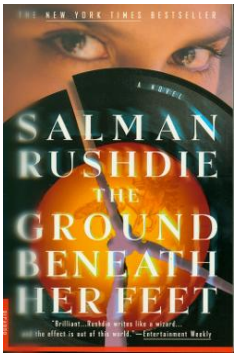

Preview

The ground beneath her feet : a novel (#31006Q2)

by Rushdie, Salman

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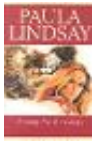

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Overview

From Follett

Vina Apsara, a famous and much-loved singer, disappears in a devastating earthquake, leaving behind her long-time lover Ormus Cama, who finds, loses, seeks, and finds her again and again throughout his life in music.

From the Publisher

Salman Rushdie's most ambitious and accomplished novel, sure to be hailed as his masterpiece.

At the beginning of this stunning novel, Vina Apsara, a famous and much-loved singer, is caught up in a devastating earthquake and never seen again by human eyes. This is her story, and that of Ormus Cama, the lover who finds, loses, seeks, and again finds her, over and over, throughout his own extraordinary life in music. Their epic romance is narrated by Ormus's childhood friend and Vina's sometime lover, her "back-door man," the photographer Rai, whose astonishing voice, filled with stories, images, myths, anger, wisdom, humor, and love, is perhaps the book's true hero. Telling the story of Ormus and Vina, he finds

that he is also revealing his own truths: his human failings, his immortal longings. He is a man caught up in the loves and quarrels of the age's goddesses and gods, but dares to have ambitions of his own. And lives to tell the tale.

Around these three, the uncertain world itself is beginning to tremble and break. Cracks and tears have begun to appear in the fabric of the real. There are glimpses of abysses below the surfaces of things. The Ground Beneath Her Feet is Salman Rushdie's most gripping novel and his boldest imaginative act, a vision of our shaken, mutating times, an engagement with the whole of what is and what might be, an account of the intimate, flawed encounter between the East and the West, a brilliant remaking of the myth of Orpheus, a novel of high (and low) comedy, high (and low) passions, high (and low) culture. It is a tale of love, death, and rock 'n' roll.

Product Details

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Reviews & Awards

Booklist starred, 02/01/99
Kirkus Reviews starred, 01/15/99
Library Journal, 04/15/99
New York Times, 04/18/99
Publishers Weekly starred, 02/15/99
Wilson's Fiction, 10/01/10

Full-Text Reviews

Booklist starred (Vol. 95, No. 11 (February 1, 1999))

William Faulkner may have known his universe--his fictional Yoknapatawpha County--as well as he knew the proverbial back of his hand, but Rushdie has literally the entire world as his universe, and he knows it no less intimately than Faulkner knew Mississippi. Those who believe that Rushdie's previous novel, The Moor's Last Sigh (1996), could not be bested in terms of sweep, depth, and beauty will revise their thinking in the face of his latest novel. It's big, rich, complicated, time consuming, and a total knockout; readers will be intoxicated by it from start to finish. It's about India, about being Indian, and about resisting being Indian--in other words, about the opposing pull on Indians by both the East and the West. The story opens on Valentine's Day 1989, the day the legendary Indian pop singer Vina Aspara dies a dramatic death in a Mexican earthquake. Her longtime friend, professional photographer Umeed Merchant, then proceeds to narrate--leaving very little out--the story of Vina's life. In dying young, Vina "was an unfinished song abandoned at the bridge, deprived of the right to follow her life's verses to their final, fulfilling rhyme." But the narrator also relates, in the same kind of luxurious detail, the life story of Ormus Cama, also a friend of his and, more to the point, Vina's great love; in the process of telling about his friends' lives, he relates the events of his own. All of this amounts to an infinitely beguiling feast of a yarn, played out over several years and all over the world. Ironically, as the tale grows longer, the point of it intensifies in focus: that "the love of Ormus and Vina is as close as [the narrator has] come to a knowledge of the mythic, the overweening, the divine." Be prepared to be moved by the sheer joy of life and language it inspires.

Kirkus Reviews starred (1999)

The blessings and curses of fame, the seismic character of sociopolitical change, and the dream of transcending our earthbound natures are the commanding--though scarcely only--themes of this brilliant epic reimagining of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, by the internationally acclaimed and reviled author of The Satanic Verses. Photojournalist (and "event junkie") Umeed, a.k.a. "Rai" Merchant relates in a stunningly flexible, observant, and wry narrative voice the story of the volatile enduring love binding two Indian-born musical superstars: coloratura rock singer Vina Apsara and composer-performer Orpheus Cama. That story begins in the late 1980s when Vina perishes in an earthquake (one of this novel's recurring symbolic events); backtracks to describe, in luscious comic detail, Vina's violence-haunted American childhood, Orpheus's youth among a prominent Parsi family ruled by his Anglophilic scholar-athlete father "Sir Darius" (a magnificently drawn character) and shaped by the contrary fates of two sets of twin sons (one of whom becomes a notorious mass murderer), and Rai's own confused relations with them both. The narrative then surges forward to 1995, after Vina's apparent "reincarnation" has ironically confirmed Orpheus's messianic conviction that "There is a world other than ours and it's bursting through our own continuum's flimsy defences," and, in a way Rai could not have foreseen, this Orpheus and Eurydice are reunited. No brief summary can accurately convey this astonishingly rich novel's historical, religious, mythological--and, not least, pop-musical--range of reference, or the exhilaration of Rushdie's mischievous transliterations of world history (Oswald's gun jammed; Borges's Pierre Menard really did write Don Quixote). It's a brash polyglot symphony of colliding and cross-pollinating "worlds"; a vision of internationalism that echoes and amplifies the plea for obliterating our differences so prominent in Rushdie's The Moor's Last Sigh (1996). An unparalleled demonstration of a great writer at the peak of his powers.

Library Journal (January 1, 1999)

Memories of a celebrated singer lost during an earthquake.

Library Journal (April 15, 1999)

Vina Apsara, a charismatic singer, and Ormus Cama, a visionary songwriter, unite in the late 1960s to form VTO, the worlds greatest rocknroll band. Jetset photographer Rai Merchant, who grew up with both stars in Bombay, recounts the bands history, using the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as a frame story. The text is a mosaic of 1960s trivia. Rock lyrics are embedded in every photograph. There are caricatures of industry moguls like Ahmet Ertegun, and cameo appearances by pop culture icons like the Jean Seberg character from Godards Breathless. All inhabit a parallel universe where The Watergate Affair is a best-selling thriller and both Kennedy brothers are killed by the same magic bullet. Ormuss Earthquake song cycle actually predicts

an endtime catastrophe where the VTO world collides with our own. Rushdies irreverent but respectful take on the counterculture is pitch perfect. U2s decision to include a VTO song on their next CD should generate a lot of interest in this book. Highly recommended. [Previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 1/99.]Edward B. St. John, Loyola Law Sch., Los Angeles

Publishers Weekly (February 15, 1999)

Time and space, understood conventionally, have never been enough for Rushdie's antic imagination, and here he needs two parallel universes to contain this playful, highly allusive journey through the last 40 years of pop culture. Ormus Cama, a supernaturally gifted musician, and his beloved, Vina Apsara, a half-Indian woman with a soul-thrilling voice, meet in Bombay in the late '50s, discover rock and roll, and form a band that goes on to become the world's most popular musical act. Narrator Rai Merchant, their lifelong friend, is a world-famous photographer and Vina's "backdoor man." Rai tells the story of their great, abiding love (both are named for love gods: Cama as in Kama Sutra, and Vina for Venus), which thrives on obstacles. At first Vina is underage, and Ormus swears not to touch her until she turns 16; then, after one night of love, she disappears for a decade, returning only to rescue Ormus from a near fatal coma. While he swears chastity for a decade, Vina tests their commitment with a string of other lovers, of whom only Rai is kept secret. Ultimately, Ormus and Vina reenact the Orpheus myth, not once but twice. And this is only the heart of a plot whose action moves from Bombay to London to Manhattan. Rai's work as photographer underwrites meditations on 20th-century art and journalism. Rock and roll inspires endless fun, as Rushdie sprinkles lyrics into his narrative, and scrambles pop music names and history--Elvis Presley becomes Jesse Garon Parker, for instance. History is scrambled, too: Watergate turns out to be nothing more than a pulp thriller. The reader slowly discovers that the novel is set in a universe parallel to our own, and the characters catch glimpses of an alternate reality that looks more like our actual world. Despite many comic and dazzling passages, the hyperbole, the scrambled allusions and the parallel universes eventually become wearying. While not one of his masterpieces, this flawed giant is a spirited, head-spinning entertainment from a writer of undeniable genius. Agent: The Wylie Agency. Rights sold in Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and the U.K. (Apr.)

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