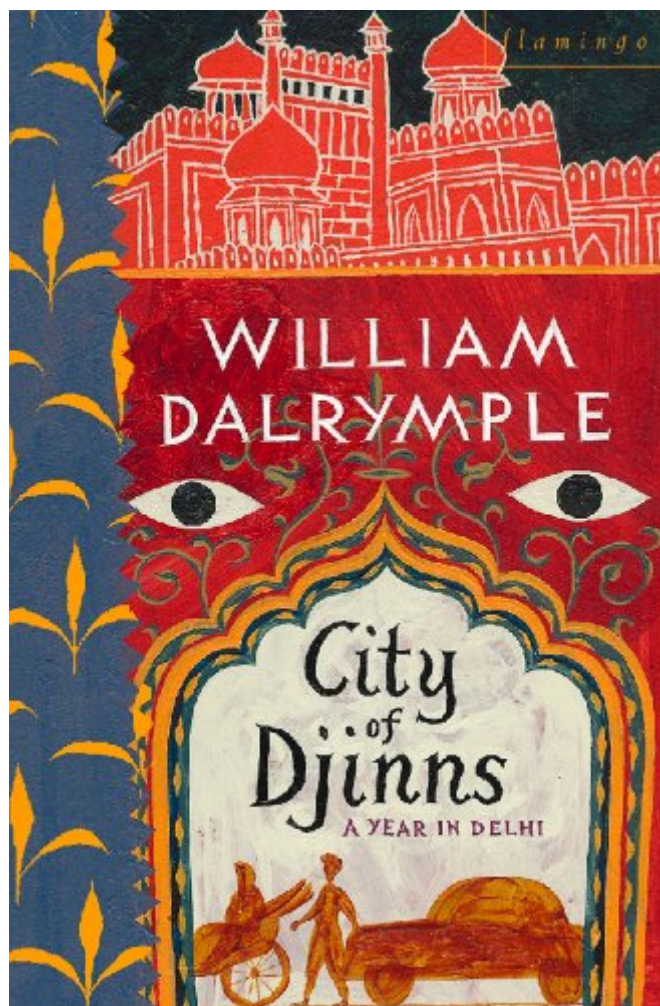


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City Of Djinns



Synopsis

“Could you show me a djinn?” I asked. “Certainly,” replied the Sufi. “But you would run away.” From the author of the Samuel Johnson Prize-shortlisted *The Return of a King*, this is William Dalrymple’s captivating memoir of a year spent in Delhi, a city watched over and protected by the mischievous invisible djinns. Lodging with the beady-eyed Mrs Puri and encountering an extraordinary array of characters – from elusive eunuchs to the last remnants of the Raj – William Dalrymple comes to know the bewildering city intimately. He pursues Delhi’s interlacing layers of history along narrow alleys and broad boulevards, brilliantly conveying its intoxicating mix of mysticism and mayhem. *City of Djinns* is an astonishing and sensitive portrait of a city, and confirms William Dalrymple as one of the most compelling explorers of India’s past and present.

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Customer Reviews

I read this book when it was first published; I was living in New Delhi at the time. Dalrymple’s writing

astounded me, especially for one so young as he was then. I've thought of the book many times in the past 15 or so years, and when I learned one of my friends plans to travel to N.D. in the coming spring, I knew I had to gift her with this book. She will love it as much as I do, I predict. The layers of the city are peeled back through Dalrymple's sensitive approach to history and culture, and the reader is transported to places and times that are long gone, as well as those that are contemporary. Walking through the streets of New Delhi and Old, the reader feels as though the City has come alive in some other dimension. Voices speak from the past, and some of those voices have lessons to share.

I found the author's relentlessly ponderous writing style to be unreadable. It was like reading a catalogue. I quit around page 100.

This is an outstanding book about Delhi. It is well written, engaging and informative. It was recommended to us when we moved here. However, this is not a book about the Delhi of today, and readers looking for information about today's city, or planning a trip on the basis of the book would be disappointed. Nevertheless, it is well worth a read. And the djinns still inhabit the ruins, if you know where to look.

A great story beautifully written that also provides accessible lessons about Delhi's chequered history. Using both established historical figures and fictional characters, he leads us on a journey through empires of fantastic wealth, ambition and changing fates. Well worth reading.

If you think you know Dehli well, then read this as I am sure you will learn something new. It's a great read and will sure to set you searching and I found it went a long way to explain what is so different about Dehli, compared to other Indian cities.

I was born and brought up in Delhi, and lived there for 21 years of my life, after which I emigrated to the United States. This book made me feel that how oblivious many of us 'locals' are, of the many riches and insights that my home city has to offer. William Dalrymple peels the multilayered culture of the historical city of Delhi - seven times the capital of empires - ruined and rebuilt again. He spans from the Punjabi immigrants that've filled the newer parts of economically booming Delhi since the partition of India in 1947; to the more historic but now decrepit old Delhi - where the legendary age old 'Persian' customs such as the 'Kabootar' (Pegion) fights, the 'Chor' (Thief) Bazaars and the

mysterious 'Hakims' (Doctors practicing an old school of medicine) are unquestioned parts of the daily lives of many. Dalrymple also describes the curious and unique collision of history leading to the current day fate of the Indian Hijras (Eunuchs), who ring the door bells of apartments of Delhi's denizens, in the old city and the new, on any kind of festivity. He describes the fascinating history and architecture of the tomb of Humayun and Hazrat Nizam-ud-din, the charming old 'Quawwalis' (musical forums) still alive there, and many other monuments that I visited umpteen times as a kid, the 'Sadhus', an ancient culture intact with flavors... the list is endless. Somehow, I missed making the connections, and could see the beauty of the entire kaliedoscope when I read this book. I find my visits to Delhi so much more fascinating. One thing that the readers must be made aware though is the overt focus on history of Mughal (Persian) Delhi - which is for a reason - that all the pre-Mughal monuments were destroyed. The Delhi that exists is newer than the spirit of the city really is. Since I read this book I always try to find such books on the cities I've visited. A strong recommend for anyone visiting Delhi -- you can choose to be put off by the seeming boorishness of the existing 'New' Delhi, or scratch beneath the surface and discover magic!

I love this author! Descriptive elements and characters that have a genuine character and an authentic voice. Extremely readable and informative!

I lived in Delhi for just under a year in the eighties, and if I had had this book then, it would have been a completely different experience for me. I walked by so much history in puraani delhi, and understood little of its significance. When I return to Delhi, this book will light my way into Mughal, British and Sufi Delhi. I agree with another reviewer that Dalrymple says relatively little about Hindu Delhi, but I think Delhi is one of the most historically cosmopolitan of cities in a subcontinent that is often painted as Hindu in broad strokes. I hope no reader takes as disrespect when I say that Hindu India gets plenty of attention; I am glad that Dalrymple focused on what cultural roads are less traveled. He does tell, and beautifully so, the story of the role of Delhi's ancestral settlement in the Mahabharata. What I loved most about the book was its portrayal of the vibrant Sufi community in India; the life of a Sufi dargah; the Qawwali singers. Learning about Sufi Delhi was a great and valuable revelation to me.

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