



A Great and Terrible Beauty (The Gemma Doyle Trilogy)

By Libba Bray



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It's 1895, and after the suicide of her mother, 16-year-old Gemma Doyle is shipped off from the life she knows in India to Spence, a proper boarding school in England. Lonely, guilt-ridden, and prone to visions of the future that have an uncomfortable habit of coming true, Gemma's reception there is a chilly one. To make things worse, she's been followed by a mysterious young Indian man, a man sent to watch her. But why? What is her destiny? And what will her entanglement with Spence's most powerful girls—and their foray into the spiritual world—lead to?

From the Hardcover edition.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

A Victorian boarding school story, a Gothic mansion mystery, a gossipy romp about a clique of girlfriends, and a dark other-worldly fantasy--jumble them all together and you have this complicated and unusual first novel.

Gemma, 16, has had an unconventional upbringing in India, until the day she foresees her mother's death in a black, swirling vision that turns out to be true. Sent back to England, she is enrolled at Spence, a girls' academy with a mysterious burned-out East Wing. There Gemma is snubbed by powerful Felicity, beautiful Pippa, and even her own dumpy roommate Ann, until she blackmails herself and Ann into the treacherous clique. Gemma is distressed to find that she has been followed from India by Kartik, a beautiful young man who warns her to fight off the visions. Nevertheless, they continue, and one night she is led by a child-spirit to find a diary that reveals the secrets of a mystical Order. The clique soon finds a way to accompany Gemma to the other-world realms of her visions "for a bit of fun" and to taste the power they will never have as Victorian wives, but they discover that the delights of the realms are overwhelmed by a menace they cannot control. Gemma is left with the knowledge that her role as the link between worlds leaves her with a mission to seek out the "others" and rebuild the Order. *A Great and Terrible Beauty* is an impressive first book in what should prove to be a fascinating trilogy. (Ages 12 up) –Patty Campbell

From School Library Journal

Grade 9 Up An interesting combination of fantasy, light horror, and historical fiction, with a dash of romance thrown in for good measure. On her 16th birthday, Gemma Doyle fights with her mother. She wants to leave India where her family is living, runs off when her mother refuses to send her to London to school, has a dreadful vision and witnesses her mother's death. Two months later, Gemma is enrolled in London's Spence School, still troubled by visions, and unable to share her grief and guilt over her loss. She gradually learns to control her vision and enter the "realms" where magical powers can make anything happen and where her mother waits to instruct her. Gradually she and her new friends learn about the Order, an ancient group of women who maintained the realms and regulated their power, and how two students unleashed an evil creature from the realms by killing a Gypsy girl. Gemma uncovers her mother's connection to those events and learns what she now must do. The fantasy element is obvious, and the boarding-school setting gives a glimpse into a time when girls were taught gentility and the importance of appearances. The author also makes a point about the position of women in Victorian society. Bray's characters are types--Felicity, clever and powerful; Ann, plain and timid; Pippa, beautiful and occasionally thoughtless; Gemma, spirited and chafing under society's rules--but not offensively so, and they do change as the story progresses. The ending leaves open the likelihood of a sequel. Recommend this to fantasy fans who also like Sherlock Holmes or Mary Russell.--Lisa Prolman, Greenfield Public Library, MA

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 8-12. Gemma Doyle is no ordinary nineteenth-century British teenager; she has disturbing visions. Upon finding the diary of a young student who was also a visionary of sorts, Gemma and three classmates, each of whom, like Gemma, has a personal demon to overcome, follow the diarist's lead and travel into the Realms, a place of both joy and danger. The jacket, a photo of a young woman in a tightly laced corset and lacy camisole, bespeaks a steamy love story (Gemma does have some sexy dreams about a young gypsy), but the costume is really a metaphor for the strictures against women of the period, which Bray limns extremely well

in her debut novel. The Realms and the mystery surrounding the diary are less well handled, yet there's no doubt the mystical elements, along with a touch of forbidden romance, will draw a large, enthusiastic audience, who will come away wanting more about stubborn, willful Gemma and the strange world whose doors she can open at will. *Stephanie Zvirin*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Christopher Williams:

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