

**Review: The Magicians of Mazda by Ashwin Sanghi**

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*Complex and entertaining, informative and intelligently crafted, the latest novel in the Bharat series seamlessly merges fact with fiction*

**By Biswadeep Ghosh**

A good thriller has the ability to surprise the reader. Viewed in that context, Ashwin Sanghi's *The Magicians of Mazda* is a gripping success story. The latest novel in Sanghi's Bharat series that began with *The Rozabal Line* in 2008, *The Magicians of Mazda* seamlessly merges facts with fiction. The author's extensive research allows him to create a wide range of characters from different parts of the world, who contribute to the turning points in the novel.

Complex and entertaining, informative and intelligently crafted, the story progresses without slowing down. That's a remarkable achievement, but then *The Magicians of Mazda* is not a run-of-the-mill best seller that sacrifices substance for pace.

The opening chapter begins inside the British Museum in London. A shooting and the theft of an artefact called the Cyrus Cylinder starts the proceedings. The wheels of the narrative don't stop in London but move swiftly to Seattle where Jim Dastoor, a rich Parsi scientist, is close to achieving a research breakthrough. If all goes well, Jim's discovery will transform the future of not just the pharmaceutical industry but of humankind as a whole.

Among his colleagues is Dan Cohen, a scientist with a secret, who plays a vital role in the story. Jim's wife Linda, a historian, is abducted, and used as bait to get through to Jim. Where will they take Jim, who, predictably, meets the same fate? What are they after, and why is he important to them? These questions, and many more, are answered as the plot unfolds.

Abducted for the second time, Jim is taken to Tehran. Turns out the Ayatollah, the Supreme Leader of Iran, wants a relic called the Athraivan Star. The scientist is asked to reveal its whereabouts. After he says he has no clue, he is confined to a "coffin cell." Living conditions there are so bad that prisoners can eventually die.

Linda sets out on a rescue mission to find her missing husband. She must enter mainland Iran, but that won't be easy because the country doesn't share a relationship of cooperation with the United States.

*The Magicians of Mazda* has an action-packed story in which intelligence agents from various nations get involved. The author's keen research is evident in his depiction of places featured in the novel – London, Seattle, Udvada in Gujarat, Kashmir and the coffin cells of Tehran. Suspense hangs in the air, betrayal cannot be ruled out, while a new revelation is rarely far away.

Equally engrossing is the portrayal of the Zoroastrian faith and the Parsis, which encompasses subjects like the former's origin, teachings, the hardships they faced in Iran and their eventual arrival in India in the 8th century, and of course, their significant contribution to the making of modern-day Mumbai. The author's meticulous research and the nuggets of information sprinkled across the novel add to the richness of the story. The reader learns that the East India Company had established "a group of patrol ships" called the "Bombay Marine" to "protect the coast and harbour". "Interestingly, this force eventually morphed into what is now called the Indian Navy."

Elsewhere, the reader is told that zara from Zarathustra also means "gold" in old Persian. "Which is how, in India, gold-embroidery came to be known as zari." "In Sanskrit, thushtra implies a binary star – a twin star like Sirius, Gemini, Mizar or Pollima...." Such richness of detail revealed in a fast-paced work is the mark of a confident and ambitious author. The prose is lucid, which allows Sanghi to communicate the complexity of the story more effectively to the average reader.

India has very few good thriller writers. *The Magicians of Mazda* proves, once again, why Ashwin Sanghi is one of them.

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The views expressed are personal*