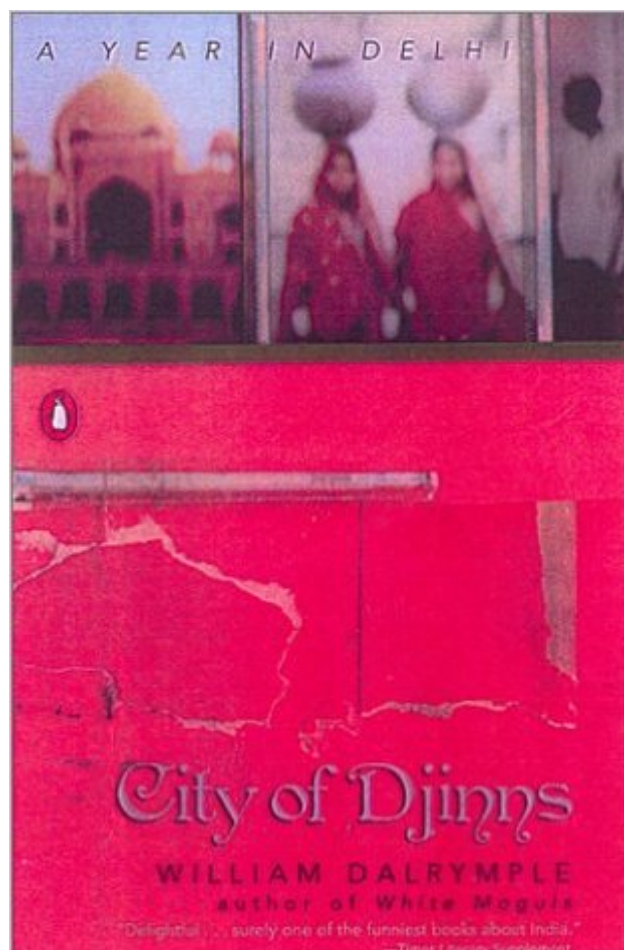


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City Of Djinns: A Year In Delhi



Synopsis

Â Sparkling with irrepressible wit, *City of Djinns* peels back the layers of Delhi's centuries-old history, revealing an extraordinary array of characters along the way—from eunuchs to descendants of great Moguls. With refreshingly open-minded curiosity, William Dalrymple explores the seven "dead" cities of Delhi as well as the eighth city—today's Delhi. Underlying his quest is the legend of the djinns, fire-formed spirits that are said to assure the city's Phoenix-like regeneration no matter how many times it is destroyed. Entertaining, fascinating, and informative, *City of Djinns* is an irresistible blend of research and adventure.

Book Information

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Writing

Customer Reviews

This book, 90% informative and 10% humorous, equals 100% reading enjoyment. It's a delightful and entertaining history of Delhi, India told in a very ingenious way: it runs in reverse pattern from conventional history books in that it starts with the most recent history first and then gradually works back into time, ending in the ancient. However, what I enjoyed the most was how the author always introduces some present-day aspect (an existing ruin or a living person) as background material on which he weaves his historical journey in and out of Delhi's past and present. For example, a Dr. Jaffrey is his link to the Red Fort; a now very old Indian-born English woman, Alice, describes her associations with Lutyens, the creator of New Delhi; a Pakeezah Begum, a crown-princess and librarian, is one of the last surviving descendants of the Mughal emperors and becomes the modern-day connection to history of the Mughal dynasty; and the very decrepit Residency tells you about Delhi's romantic past in the era when it was beautifully intact. I don't know why, but to me the

most poignant stories told were about the Anglo-Indians who ended up abandoned by both Britain and India after the birth of an independent India. I never realized such unfortunate people existed, becoming political refugees denied rights by India, the country of their birth; and by the UK, to which they had blood ties. Mr. Dalrymple interviews a few of these people who by now have grown old and are the living remnants of hardball politics of a bygone era. They give their personal accounts of their own hardships. As victims abused by the system, they were denied basic privileges. These interviews are still quite vivid in my memory. In the midst of all the daunting history of this city, Mr.

City of Djinns: A Year in Delhi by William Dalrymple is an excellent portrait of a fascinating city. I have to admit, having read a few travel essay books on India that the image I had of the city was of a fairly uninteresting place, a "city of gray bureaucracy" as the author put it. Dalrymple showed me just how wrong I was in this intimate depiction of Delhi, past and present. One of the first things the reader learns in this book is that there is more than one Delhi. The two main Delhis are Mughal Old Delhi and Punjabi New Delhi, each keeping largely to itself, each "absolutely certain of its superiority over the other." Old Delhi has been inhabited for thousands of years, its Urdu-speaking elite (both Hindu and Muslim) having lived in the city for many centuries, the city an ancient one of sophistication and culture, though also a city in severe decline, with many of its once magnificent palaces, gardens, tombs, and mosques, once examples of the "silky refinement" of Mughal architecture now crumbling into ruin, decaying into "something approaching seediness." Many of its citizens are among the last to practice trades dating back to Mughal times, and a large number of them live in exile in Pakistan. In contrast, New Delhi is a growing, booming, bustling city of hard-working nouveau-riche entrepreneurs, largely comprised of people whose roots only go back to the catastrophic days of Partition in 1947, when hundreds of thousands of Punjabi Sikh and Hindu refugees poured into the city.

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