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Midnight, at the War

by Devi S. Laskar



About the Book

Inspired by journalists Christiane Amanpour and Sylvia Poggioli, MIDNIGHT, AT THE WAR is a novel about a reporter chasing the biggest story of her career as she contends with a tense newsroom, a dangerous global conflict, and all the problems she?s running away from at home, by the acclaimed novelist that Megha Majumdar calls ?a gem of a writer.?

Foreign correspondent Rita Das has left New York for the war-torn Middle East, a reassignment she asked for after learning she is pregnant but uncertain if the father is her husband or her lover. As she strives to shed light on the fallouts of the war, Rita finds herself embroiled in her own conflicts with her interpreter and her news editor, her sources and her colleagues. She is unable to accept the loss of her mother and deal with her guilt for not being at her side when she died.

Fiercely independent and ambitious (and, in her journalism, deeply humane), Rita is also in denial about her need for intimate human relationships. As she goes into the field to report on the war, she grapples with the physical and emotional tolls of her pregnant body and a turbulent region where the numbing repetition of war slides suddenly into horror. When her news editor delivers urgent orders for her to return to New York, Rita is faced with a choice about how she wants to live her life as a journalist and a soon-to-be mother.

Set in the years immediately after 9/11, and drawn from Devi Laskar?s own experience as a government reporter in the 1990s and early aughts, MIDNIGHT, AT THE WAR is an exploration of love and grief, of moral ambiguity and forgiveness, of modern war and the wars we wage within ourselves.

Discussion Guide

1. How would you describe and compare the relationship Rita Das has with each parent?

2. What does Ford represent in Rita?s life?

3. How is that different from what Sebastian represents?

4. What personal challenges do Rita and her brother, Adam, face after 9/11?

5. What does Rita observe about the news before and after 9/11 ? How has the news shifted?

6. What are the big themes in this book in addition to love?

7. What does Rita teach her translator, Rafiq, and what does Rita learn from Rafiq?

8. Who is your favorite character in the novel? And why?

9. What is the historical context/backdrop of the novel? What is percolating under the surface?

10. How does the unhealed trauma of Rita?s youth change her family dynamics?

11. How would describe "truth" after reading this book? How is it different from or the same as "facts"?

12. What does India represent to Rita and to the other members of her family?

13. What did you feel when Hanan went missing?

14. Journalists take great risks and face lethal violence when reporting from war-torn parts of the world --- to bring the truth to the people. What did you feel when you consider Margot and Johanna and the sacrifices they make? What do you think of Margot?s choices in the latter part of the novel? And Rafiq?s?

15. After reading this novel, what questions about that tumultuous time after 9/11 do you want to further discuss with your reading group/book club?

Author Bio

Devi S. Laskar is a poet, novelist, artist, photographer, songwriter and former newspaper reporter. Her debut poetry collection, SELF-PORTRAITS EX MACHINA, is out now from Finishing Line Press. Laskar is the author of the award-winning novel THE ATLAS OF REDS AND BLUES and, recently, CIRCA, a GOOP Book Club selection. Her third novel is the newly released MIDNIGHT, AT THE WAR, and her first spoken-word album is coming out this spring. In 2022, *USA Today* named her one of 50 AAPI authors to read. She holds degrees from Columbia University, University of Illinois and UNC-Chapel Hill. She now lives in California with her family.

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