



Bollywood and the Beast

Suleikha Snyder

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It's not just the roses that have thorns.

Bollywood Confidential, Book 3

American-born ingénue Rakhee “Rocky” Varma knows a career in Bollywood is no fairy tale, but that truth hits home when her outspoken nature lands her in hot water with the media.

Banished to her leading man’s crumbling mansion on the outskirts of Delhi until things cool down, she is wholly unprepared to meet her costar’s reclusive brother, Taj Ali Khan. Taj, a former action hero until a stunt gone horribly wrong ended his career, wears a cape of scars and a crown of rudeness.

As his cynicism collides with her determination to stick it out in Bollywood no matter what, sparks fly. But little do they know that demons not of their making may turn their fiery, fragile connection to ash. And it will take more than sheer grit to face down the most frightening monsters of all—the ones inside themselves.

Warning: This book contains lewd comments, forbidden love, lots of angsty glances, inappropriate use of an Indian scarf, and an oddly appropriate reference to Lord of the Rings.

Bollywood and the Beast Details

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From Reader Review Bollywood and the Beast for online ebook

K. Lincoln says

3.5 stars, actually.

I wanted to like this one so much, it would have taken very little to please me: Bollywood? Beauty & the Beast retelling? Biracial/Bicultural desi heroine who doesn't shy away from calling out racial and cultural issues she's facing as an actress? Love. All of that is exactly my cup of tea.

This book wasn't quite my cup of tea, however. I've been thinking about the problem and I think it has to do with my expectations of how much time we spend with the hero and the heroine together.

In this book, we get a lot of Taj thinking his grumbly, self-hating thoughts, and we get a lot of Rakhee thinking about how she has to prove herself to everyone, but we don't see a lot of them together. We don't get a lot of excellent banter or experience the falling-in-love parts I enjoy so much because we're stuck in their heads a lot of the time without each other. And also stuck in Taj's brother's head, Ashu, who has some life revelations of his own going on.

I thought I would love the Hindi phrases that are consistently used throughout, but after a while I felt some of them, while adding to the authentic feeling of Bollywood's bilingual culture, was a bit distancing for those of us who don't speak it. Which is weird for me to say because usually I'm all over uses of other languages in American fiction. I think the author could have done a slightly more self-conscious job of "teaching" certain phrases to us.

So there's a lot of emotional trauma, and a few scenes where Taj and Rakhee come together are great, but the overall flow of the story never drew me in, which is a shame, because there's so much here that's good in pieces.

Oscario says

First, I have to confess : **I am a Suleikha Snyder fanboy.**

I read her books. I read her blog. I follow her on Twitter. Yes. I'm that kind of guy. And you should be as well. This woman has things to teach you in terms of POC, open-mindedness, and hot guys.

That being said, having a shrine for my Snyderity won't prevent me from putting things into perspective.

Basically the Bollywood Confidential series is about Bollywood, strong female characters, some LGBT storylines, and kinky sex, all wrapped up into a big soap opera (*if this do not put you into "auto-buy mode" nothing will save you from the gates of Hell. Just telling*).

Now obviously, this one is aiming for a Beauty and the Beast retelling. You know the story, let's skip to the review and why this is only a three stars rating.

The First Missing Star "The Romance" : I liked the main protagonists individually. I could relate to the distress of an American born Indian actress trying to make it big in the Bollywood industry. I could understand the ascetic life of a disfigured star. But when during their first meeting the guy goes "Hi ! I'm a jerk" and the girl answers "Hi ! Even if you hurt my feelings I'm going to love you no matter what". It didn't

work for me. So even though their relationship was pleasant to read, I couldn't bring myself to *believe* in it. Something was, well, missing.

The Three Shining Stars "Everything else" : That's the book's paradox. The main storyline gets overshadowed by the subplot of Ashraf, the suffering little brother. His story was so interesting, so heart-wrenching that the heroes' worries seem kind of bland in comparison. Really, Ashu IS the star of the show! Besides, Ms Snyder knows how to write. I like her style and how she brings up a bit of Hindi every now and then in her characters' thoughts and words. She makes you travel and feel a taste of the Indian Dream.

The Last Missing Star "The Faith" : As my little introduction hinted, I am part of the Suleikult and for that reason, I feel that this author can do even better than this really nice read. In fact, I am paying my respects to the following other awesome books to come by sacrificing a star on the altar of Greatness just to say to this incredible woman : *keep doing such a good job, keep challenging the established stereotypes, I know that you are capable of so much more.*

Amen.

Vendela says

Brilliant romance novel, and bonus queer secondary romance. I loved this so much.

Nayab says

Bollywood and the Beast is GLORIOUS. It has desi rep, LGBTQIA+ rep and just really likeable characters overall.

The romance (if you can call it that, it seemed more like lust to me, to be honest) moved too fast for me. Taj went from complete dislike of Rakhee to wanting her/loving her in the space of a few chapters. The way the story had been until that point, I expected it to be more of a slow burn. I wanted it to be more... Bollywood I guess, in its lead up to romance... Stolen glances, the accidentally-on-purpose touches, the trying to stay away from each other/deny their feelings until they can't anymore and they confess their feelings, you know, all of that and more. As it was, it felt to me like Rakhee and Taj's romance was glossed over, I was unaffected by it I guess.

When the book started I was ALL about the two of them and their budding romance until a few chapters passed and I realised I was reading the book more for all the characters (and Rakhee and Taj separately from each other) instead of just for them. Normally, I suss out the romance before I even buy/choose a book but this time the romance was secondary to the characters for me, which rarely happens (it's only happened once before, that's how rare it is).

This was definitely worth the read though and I'm glad I bought a few of Suleikha's other books when I bought this because I'll definitely be reading more from her in the near future.

SmartBitches says

Full review at Smart Bitches, Trashy Books

Bollywood and the Beast by Suleikha Snyder caused me to pull a Bad Decisions Book Club moment at RT...does that mean I leveled up? Is that the Bad-Ass Decisions Book Club? So many questions.

As you may have guessed from the title, *Bollywood and the Beast* is a Beauty and the Beast story set in Bollywood—but it's so much more than that. It's a book about a bi-racial heroine not feeling accepted by any cultural identity, and it has a delicious May/December m/m romance on the side. It's all the things, you guys.

For some reason, I woke up at RT at 2 a.m. and couldn't fall back asleep. So I started reading this book, and by 5 a.m. I was still reading even though I knew I had to get some sleep because I had places to be. The entire next day was spent dashing between panels and parties, and the Starbucks across the street, where I was desperately caffeinating. I was fueled solely by cold brew and grit. It was worth it.

I'm 100% here for lovable curmudgeon heroes, you guys. I consider myself a lovable curmudgeoness half the time. It's hard to pull it off without making the hero just seem like an asshole, but Snyder totally does it.

But the thing that really, really worked for me about this book is that it's about family, both found and biological. It's largely set apart from Bollywood, in the secluded Delhi mansion. Ashraf, Rocky and Taj quickly come together as a family without intending to, supporting each other and caring for each other even at their worst. Rocky becomes the glue that allows Taj and Ashraf to come closer, and slowly the three of them become a team who will fight for and love each other.

So to sum it up, we have Beauty and the Beast, found family, surprise m/m love story that broke my fucking heart, and lovable curmudgeon. It was kind of like this book was written just for me.

I thought the ending to *Bollywood and the Beast* was a little abrupt and I wanted more of Kamal and Ashraf, but otherwise it was totally worth the twenty-ish dollars I spent on coffee the next day.

Min says

this book was all tell and no show. if you are one of those weirdos who actually likes seeing the main characters interact with each other and seeing the relationship develop, this book is not for you. it starts off great with our h Rocky dealing with some mean girls, but then the two main characters meet and it's downhill from there.

it's a Beauty and the Beast theme, so ofc the first meeting between Rocky and Taj doesn't end on friendly terms. then the book just fast forwards several wks where both of them have now admitted to themselves that they're super attracted to the other person. Snyder throws in a few sentences that tell you the two have seen each other at meals and around the house and Rocky and Taj both really understand who the other person is from all these off-camera interactions. but we wouldn't want to slow the book down actually showing that boring shit, right? nope. let's just move on to the external threat to the *secondary* character. cause how

much time can you really spend dwelling on the main characters?

more with telling us what people are thinking and then the external threat is neutralized, and Rocky and Taj love each other, and oh what characters do we have left laying around? let's put them together, too. what? there wasn't really much relationship development for the secondary character romance, you say? Snyder told you they feel deeply for each other. what more do you want?

i gave this book 2 stars because Rocky doesn't take any shit from anyone, so at least there's that. i bought this book on sale and i still want my \$1.06 and time back.

Anne Boleyn's Ghost says

A Beauty and the Beast retelling set amid the **intrigue and drama of Bollywood**? Check.

A **secondary m/m storyline** guaranteed to tug on your heartstrings (and if doesn't, I'm not entirely convinced that you have a heart)? Check.

Lush and gorgeous writing? Check.

Vibrantly drawn characters? Check.

Despite all that, *Bollywood and the Beast* wasn't a smash success for me. Because of the pacing and the overall evolution I'm giving it **3.5 stars**, but I'm rounding up for the quality writing (and if Goodreads would get its act together and give us half stars, I wouldn't have to round at all).

The relationship between **Rocky**, a strong-willed Indian-American starlet shunned by the Bollywood community but also out of place in Chicago, and **Taj**, the former Bollywood star turned angry recluse after a car accident left him disfigured, starts strong. **Banter and heat abounds in the couple's somewhat antagonistic slow burn.** Rocky is filming a movie with **Ashraf**, Taj's sweet yet troubled younger brother. When she first encounters Taj at their family's mansion, his vulgar and cruel personality revolts her, not his face. Taj is certain that he will destroy her, that he doesn't deserve her, that he can't and shouldn't want her. But Rocky was nicknamed after a fighter for a reason. She is persistent, and when Taj begins to soften, to heal, to show his true kindness and consideration, he shines as brightly to her as any star.

Although some of the promise of their relationship was fulfilled, much was left unrealized. It ultimately devolved into telling-without-showing. Much of the action occurred off-page while other aspects felt rushed. The second half further explores the relationship between Ashraf and **Kamal**, Taj's caretaker. And while I noted that they tugged on my heartstrings, they could have tugged more if the relationship had been more developed. Both relationships felt incomplete.

I want to reiterate that the **writing was top-notch**, and the **characters were well-crafted**, but the execution ultimately fell flat for me. Still, I found it a worthwhile story and **Suleihka Snyder a worthwhile author** whose stories I will continue to read.

Read for SBTB Best Picture Quarterly Challenge: A romance with an actress.

Mirjana **DTR - Down to Read** says

*****3.5 Stars*****

This is my first time reading Suleikha Snyder, but it certainly won't be my last.

The writing here is beautiful, as is the imagery. An Indian haveli as the backdrop, the realities of a Bollywood life weaved in, an Indian-American actress finding her way in a country that refuses to accept her, and a man who had it all but felt it get ripped away in a blaze of fire and now hides from the world.

...for he'd built himself a perfect cage of stone and soil and celluloid.

I really loved the first half of this book. I loved Rakhee/Rocky's strength. She refused to let others bring her down. Her hard work and discipline would show everyone that she was to be taken seriously. And this included Taj. She immediately saw the man that was underneath the gruffness, the vulgarity, and the antagonizing defenses. She wouldn't let him push her away. She'd make him see what she saw.

But Taj refused to believe that someone as spirited, kind, and beautiful as Rocky would see anything more than the beast he's become.

"You wouldn't bloom with me, Rakhee. You would die on the vine."

Unfortunately, the evolution of their relationship had me stumbling in the second half. While things were paced nicely with the push and pull in the first half, the second half lost Rocky and Taj because of a secondary story (which I absolutely LOVED). The two stories were flowing nicely, but the emotion and heartbreak and hope of the secondary story eclipsed Rocky and Taj.

Also, what we were given was underdeveloped. Sentences where we're told they'd spent weeks having sex like bunnies. I needed more attention to the beginning of their relationship so I could stay connected. Not just the sex, but the time watching old movies, hanging out with Nani, cooking dinner....the bonding.

Even with my disappointment in the second half, I really enjoyed my first time reading Suleikha Snyder. The writing here is beautiful, I just wish the evolution of the romance transitioned better. In any event, I'll be reading more from her.

Sara says

I loved parts of this book. I loved Rocky & Taj and Ashu & Kamal. I loved the Beauty & the Beast premise and the peek into Bollywood. I loved the relationships. I loved reading from the Indian point of view - its differences from my own made the sauce richer, even if the Hindi & Urdu sprinkled so generously made it difficult to fully understand at times.

But I wanted more of all of it. Interestingly we come to know Ashraf, nominally a secondary character, the best, since he's the one who grows & changes the most. The rest, while sympathetic, remain mostly 2 dimensional. Taj Ali Khan (what great name...) is a perfect Beast, and though he does grow & change, the pacing & the movement is off - I found myself wondering how he got from point A to point B, emotion-wise, since we were told more often than shown.

Rocky, though she gets the most air time, is the least fleshed out; and though she's sweet, there isn't much there, there. Kamal, on the other hand, is described beautifully - he could have been a great character had he been allowed more action in the story. As it was, he was this large, almost mystical silent presence in many scenes. But when he was allowed to be, like in the restaurant scene or on the roof, he was staggering.

Over all, I was kept engaged, and wanting more. I'd recommend the book just for some of the beautiful prose, but also because there are 2 romances here and they are worth reading.

Anoia says

I don't know any think about Bollywood outside of a few clips I've watched, but I have liked what I've seen. On the flip side, I am specious of retellings of fairy tales as there are so many, and so many that have gone horribly wrong. Add to that, Beauty and the Beast has to be one of my least liked stories for many reasons.

All that said, I really liked this book.

It owns the Beauty and Beast connection upfront, the characters referencing it with derision on the part of the 'beauty' Rakhee "Rocky" Varma, an American who is trying to make her way in the Bollywood movie business. The character's outsider status was really nice as it helps introduce concepts, language, and references to those of us who have no knowledge of any of it without it feeling like an info dump.

The one issue I have with the story is the 'insta lust' between Rocky and the 'beast' Taj Ali Khan. Khan was disfigured in an accident and has spent the last ten or so years never leaving his family's mansion. He was a great heroic/romantic actor before the accident, and has continued to be the most dramatic, scene eating alpha into his chosen isolation.

Rocky stands up to him, but the first time they kiss I found myself desperately wishing that she had just cold-cocked him right in the nose. Lady, there is no reason to put up with that crap!

The secondary plot of Khan's younger brother will tear your heart out and stomp on it, and then you will want to stop on Khan a bit for being such an ass to the poor guy. As this book is part of a series I am hoping that one of the other books covers the younger Khan's story and that he gets all the happy ever, a pile of kittens, and the world's most comfortable chair to enjoy them in.

The writing and descriptions are really nice, I have a little issue with the time frame of the romance, but then I don't get the insta love thing or the putting up with alpha-holes. But the book is a fast fun read, you want to hang out with Rocky and her family. I would love a prequel or sequel about her parents as we got to see some of how badass her mom is and I would love to see her parents interact.

The ending was a little shoehorned in and felt too quick even though we all know what's going to happen. However, a pretty good/fast introduction to a series.

Amy Cousins says

I'm a Bollywood fan and this mashup of Bolly and the classic fairytale was right up my alley. I loved all the

callouts to the Beauty and the Beast. They made me smile, as did the subplot about the hero's brother, for whom I wish a long and happy romance of his own, eventually. Mostly I wallowed in "the beast's" dilapidated castle, his glorious gardens, and his library. Good fun. :)

Fangirl Musings says

DOWN & DIRTY QUICKIE REVIEW!

One Sentence Summary:

An Indian-American Bollywood actress hides from the press at her co-star's brother's mansion; said bro is a partially scared but full on grumpy bear.

Name That Trope:

- * Beauty/Beast Retelling
- * Weak Romance, STRONG BOOK
- * Dat Diversity, Tho!
- * Secondary May/December M/M ship MAKING YA FEEL FEELS
- * So Much Woke Shade Throwing
- * Toto, I've A Feeling We're Not In Kansas Anymore Cause We In India!

What part made ya fangirl squeal?

The 23,182 times this book smacked me with word art. FO' REAL, Y'ALL! There was quotetastic dialogue and so much A+ internal character musings that a bitch done ODeD on good wordage.

Favorite Character:

Real talk? The hero's brother. Dude rocked an intense subplot that becomes the main plot, and he slayed me with emotions. I swear, his sexual abuse survival will end ya *and* save ya. I WANNA SWADDLE HIM IN HUGS & LOVES, DAMMIT!

How smexy was the smex?

Suuuuuper skimmed over. There is banging, and even a lil scarf bondage play, but it's all pretty vanilla. The choreography is vague, but the passion is definitely there. If you dislike explicit romance sex, this puppy is all for you, doll!

Whose Line Is It Anyway:

Hero's Bro: *Are you offended by a pretty girl?*

Hero: *Offense? She has committed no offense. I offend. My very life is an offense. Perfect people do not belong in this house. Beautiful people do not belong in this house. This is a tomb. Fit only for the dead.*

“To speak up, to say what no one else would dare put into words, was a privilege of only the most elite.”

Hero: *I live here.*

Grandma: *No. You stay here. You don't live here. You live with that girl. In her laughter. In her sadness. In her shadow and light.*

Got any bitching to do?

Sadly, yes. Some readers complain our hero's bro overtakes the book, and...yes/no? I enjoyed his role, I just wish more OTP scenes could've been added. As it stands, you don't get much of a transition from our couple fighting to fucking to loving. As a result their overall romance fell flat for me.

Visually Depict Yo Book Feels:

Famous Last Words:

I don't think this book works well as a romance. That said, IT IS A PHENOMENAL FUCKING STORY!!! Its messages & themes are unbelievably powerful, plus its characters are vividly emotive. There's honest anguish in all the peeps and the writing says something. Had simply a few more scenes been added of our OTP reflecting on their emotions, rather than just their lust, then I'd have zero ass complaints!

For a more in depth, LOL-fest discussion on romance novels and romance Asian dramas, HERE BE MY YOUTUBE CHANNEL:

<https://www.youtube.com/fangirlmusings>

Pili says

It took me a while to feel the connection and chemistry between the main characters and to like an connect with Taj, but I adored Rakhee from the very beginning and how she was sure of who she was and how she tried to be true to herself and respectful of those around her without letting them cower her.

I'm still a bit torn between 3 and 4 stars so I'm leaving it as a 3.5 stars.

Solace Ames says

Full disclosure: I'm a friend of the author. I've also reviewed the first two Bollywood Confidential books under my old pen name. I love these damn books. My only complaint is that she doesn't write them fast enough!

If you're coming into these without having read the first two, that's fine, it's more or less stand-alone, and you can always go and backfill. All of these stories are told in a high-intensity, high-drama language with gorgeous prose, and feature a main relationship plus an interwoven secondary relationship. The main relationship is a retelling of Beauty and the Beast as promised by the title. I'm going to put in a fairly long quote from the beginning of the book, when our two lovers meet, so you can get a flavor of this relationship.

He only stared at her, wearing the room's shadows like a crown...letting the minutes tick by until she was shifting from foot to foot and he could laugh at her show of discomfort. "You think to hurt me with the truth? I don't feel pain, Miss Rakhee." He leaned forward until the faint streaks of sun finally illuminated his features. "I'm made of stone. *Broken* stone."

The tears she'd resolved to stifle sprang to her eyes unbidden. Not because of the vicious network of scars and the sunken lid where his left eye should have been, but because of what was untouched: the perfect slope of his right cheek and the thick-lashed, mutinously angry brown eye were still absolutely gorgeous.

Half of Taj Ali Khan's face was more handsome than the whole of many of the stars in Mumbai.

And the other half reflected his soul.

Rocky backed up. Her feet hit the threshold and she nearly tumbled over the short divide. The raw sound of his laughter dared her to run...and assumed she would.

Everyone, since the moment she'd set foot in India, had expected her to turn tail and run. To give up and crawl back to the U.S. regretting the day she'd ever wanted to be a Bollywood star.

Fuck that noise.

He could play psycho lord of the manor all he wanted. He could cue up the music and do his *Phantom of the Opera* reveal a million times. She wasn't going to run.

The heroine, Rakhee, is multiracial and multicultural, but she's not "torn between two worlds," the fallback trope of the lazy narrative. Except for her imperfect Hindi, she's culturally competent in both worlds, navigating the divide with an appealing mixture of determination and vulnerability. The hero slowly redeems himself, as we know all along, but the way he does it is unexpected and wonderfully modern.

There's a lot going on here about interfaith relationships, the tragedy of India's British-colonially-inspired homophobic repression (the secondary relationship is same sex), and the long-running Bollywood Confidential theme of public image versus private reality. The book is like a cake with frothy-sweet melodrama icing over layers of deep, thoughtful moments. If you know a lot about Bollywood (I don't, not at all) I'm sure you'll get even more out of this book, and notice even more layers.

These long novellas are structured with numerous points of view (though clearly delineated) and relatively short scenes. That can take a while to get used to, and gives readers a dizzy feeling at first. We touch over the moments of highest intensity in these people's lives, never staying in one emotional state for long. That might not be to everyone's taste. The strength of this approach is that the narrative never, *ever* drags.

B&tB probably has the least sexual content of the series, and I kind of miss that, but it also fits the narrative,

and the few sex scenes are charged through with emotion and longing. This story also features an extremely satisfying ending, with just the right balance between happy closure and a near-magical sense of open possibility.

Crystal says

Bollywood and the Beast was an enjoyably dark and romantic read. Anything derived from the Beauty and the Beast fairy tale intrigues me, as does anything Indian and Bollywood, and this story did not disappoint. From the inescapable heat between Rocky and Taj, to the slow and subtle but incredibly strong passion of the secondary romance, this was a sweet, fascinating, engaging book, set in a world that is not familiar to me. I actually found the secondary romance (which I'm not describing at all, due to potential spoilers) to be almost more engaging than Rocky and Taj, with its painfully slow burn that is all the deeper for being potentially taboo. Fiesty, aggressively can-do Rocky and scarred, bitter Taj were engaging too, though. Taj's brother is a sympathetic character too, as is Taj's assistant/ caregiver, and of course the sweet grandmother. It took me time to warm up to Rocky's parents, but I learned to appreciate them too. there were other characters that were briefly encountered that I realized after I was well into the book were characters from previous books in the series. Oops. I didn't really feel like I was missing out on anything essential to understanding the story line, though, by having read the books out of order. The parts that were relevant, from the interview with Sunny to the relationship between Nina and Ashraf, were explained adequately in this book. And while there is the inclusion of lots of Hindi and Urdu names and phrases, as well as the cultural practice of many different variations on a character's name, I didn't have trouble following the story. In fact, I picked up a few of the terms.

Utterly engaging. A feel-good read I didn't want to put down until I was finished. I'll be seeking out the other titles in this series.
