



The Ground Beneath Her Feet: A Novel

By Salman Rushdie

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The Ground Beneath Her Feet: A Novel By Salman Rushdie

Salman Rushdie's most ambitious and accomplished novel, sure to be hailed as his masterpiece.

At the beginning of this stunning novel, Vina Apsara, a famous and much-loved singer, is caught up in a devastating earthquake and never seen again by human eyes. This is her story, and that of Ormus Cama, the lover who finds, loses, seeks, and again finds her, over and over, throughout his own extraordinary life in music. Their epic romance is narrated by Ormus's childhood friend and Vina's sometime lover, her "back-door man," the photographer Rai, whose astonishing voice, filled with stories, images, myths, anger, wisdom, humor, and love, is perhaps the book's true hero. Telling the story of Ormus and Vina, he finds that he is also revealing his own truths: his human failings, his immortal longings. He is a man caught up in the loves and quarrels of the age's goddesses and gods, but dares to have ambitions of his own. And lives to tell the tale.

Around these three, the uncertain world itself is beginning to tremble and break. Cracks and tears have begun to appear in the fabric of the real. There are glimpses of abysses below the surfaces of things. The Ground Beneath Her Feet is Salman Rushdie's most gripping novel and his boldest imaginative act, a vision of our shaken, mutating times, an engagement with the whole of what is and what might be, an account of the intimate, flawed encounter between the East and the West, a brilliant remaking of the myth of Orpheus, a novel of high (and low) comedy, high (and low) passions, high (and low) culture. It is a tale of love, death, and rock 'n' roll.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The ground shifts repeatedly beneath the reader's feet during the course of Salman Rushdie's sixth novel, a riff on the Orpheus and Eurydice myth set in the high-octane world of rock & roll. Readers get their first clues early on that the universe Rushdie is creating here is not quite the one we know: Jesse Aron Parker, for example, wrote "Heartbreak Hotel"; Carly Simon and Guinevere Garfunkel sang "Bridge over Troubled Water"; and Shirley Jones and Gordon McRae starred in "South Pacific." And as the novel progresses, Rushdie adds unmistakable elements of science fiction to his already patented magical realism, with occasionally uneven results.

Rushdie's cunning musician is Ormus Cana, the Bombay-born founder of the most popular group in the world. Ormus's Eurydice (and lead singer) is Vina Apsara, the daughter of a Greek American woman and an Indian father who abandoned the family. What these two share, besides amazing musical talent, is a decidedly twisted family life: Ormus's twin brother died at birth and communicates to him from "the other side"; his older brothers, also twins, are, respectively, brain-damaged and a serial killer. Vina, on the other hand, grew up in rural West Virginia where she returned home one day to find her stepfather and sisters shot to death and her mother hanging from a rafter in the barn. No wonder these two believe they were made for each other.

Narrated by Rai Merchant, a childhood friend of both Vina and Ormus, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* begins with a terrible earthquake in 1989 that swallows Vina whole, then moves back in time to chronicle the tangled histories of all the main characters and a host of minor ones as well. Rushdie's canvas is huge, stretching from India to London to New York and beyond--and there's plenty of room for him to punctuate this epic tale with pointed commentary on his own situation: Muslim-born Rai, for example, remarks that "my parents gave me the gift of irreligion, of growing up without bothering to ask people what gods they held dear.... You may argue that the gift was a poisoned chalice, but even if so, that's a cup from which I'd happily drink again." Despite earthquakes, heartbreaks, and a rip in the time-space continuum, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* may be the most optimistic, accessible novel Rushdie has yet written. --Alix Wilber

From Publishers Weekly

Time and space, understood conventionally, have never been enough for Rushdie's antic imagination, and here he needs two parallel universes to contain this playful, highly allusive journey through the last 40 years of pop culture. Ormus Cama, a supernaturally gifted musician, and his beloved, Vina Apsara, a half-Indian woman with a soul-thrilling voice, meet in Bombay in the late '50s, discover rock and roll, and form a band that goes on to become the world's most popular musical act. Narrator Rai Merchant, their lifelong friend, is a world-famous photographer and Vina's "backdoor man." Rai tells the story of their great, abiding love (both are named for love gods: Cama as in Kama Sutra, and Vina for Venus), which thrives on obstacles. At first Vina is underage, and Ormus swears not to touch her until she turns 16; then, after one night of love, she disappears for a decade, returning only to rescue Ormus from a near fatal coma. While he swears chastity for a decade, Vina tests their commitment with a string of other lovers, of whom only Rai is kept secret. Ultimately, Ormus and Vina reenact the Orpheus myth, not once but twice. And this is only the heart of a plot whose action moves from Bombay to London to Manhattan. Rai's work as photographer underwrites meditations on 20th-century art and journalism. Rock and roll inspires endless fun, as Rushdie sprinkles lyrics into his narrative, and scrambles pop music names and history: Elvis Presley becomes Jesse Garon Parker, for instance. History is scrambled, too: Watergate turns out to be nothing more than a pulp thriller. The reader slowly discovers that the novel is set in a universe parallel to our own, and the characters catch

glimpses of an alternate reality that looks more like our actual world. Despite many comic and dazzling passages, the hyperbole, the scrambled allusions and the parallel universes eventually become wearying. While not one of his masterpieces, this flawed giant is a spirited, head-spinning entertainment from a writer of undeniable genius. Agent: The Wylie Agency. Rights sold in Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and the U.K.
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From Library Journal

This is the story of Vina Aspara, a woman doomed to a life of fame and tragedy. Two men spend their lives loving her: Ormus, who becomes her partner in a band that breaks all pop music records, and Rai, who has loved her since childhood. Vina lives an unsteady life, never settling on one place or one man. The narrator, Rai, shifts among times and places frequently, often foreshadowing things to come and then going back to tell how it all came to pass. Rushdie is not writing to be heard; his allusions to mythology and pop culture are frequent and complex, inviting contemplation and consideration. This, combined with the multitude of characters and histories, makes the book difficult to follow while driving in heavy traffic or washing dishes. Nonetheless, Stephen Crossley's reading is superb, making the frequent long stretches of exposition, description, and Rai's musings on the state of the universe, which might be tedious to many readers in print, sparkle. He does a fair job of bringing the characters to life and distinguishing among their many voices. Generous pauses between scenes, which might be annoying in a less dense work, are welcome moments for reflection. This is cerebral literary fiction and a worthy book by an important author in a format many might find less intimidating than print; recommended. A Adrienne Furness, Genesee Community Coll., Batavia, NY
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michael Naylor:

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Larry Valadez:

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