

Over the Tightrope

Asif Ismael

J. R. Sarmoun (Nov 15, 2015)

Softcover \$13.99 (360pp)

978-0-9967158-0-5

This unique gumbo of a novel blurs the lines between the spirit world and reality, mixing fantasy and cosmic genres with an adventure story.

Asif Ismael's *Over the Tightrope*, an adventure with heavy doses of spirituality and religious-based fantasy, is a highly original character study of its protagonist.

The main character, Ismaeel, is a graduate student in the year 2050. He's a nonbeliever studying religion, seemingly clueless as to his own interest in other worlds and enlightenment. But after an excruciating body cleansing and the meeting of a mysterious girl named Petra who quizzes his beliefs, he realizes he must find the root of his spiritual interests. Ismaeel comes home to discover an envelope with a plane ticket to Lahore and a vial of mysterious fluid with a note instructing him to take the quest to Pakistan in order to complete a journey that will put him into the elite of the ancient spirit forces he seeks.

So begins the odyssey that lies at the core of *Over the Tightrope*, a truly psyched-out and spirituality-drenched adventure story. While many adventures are about saving the world or discovering lost treasure, this story goes almost inward, to explore the mind and body in connection with old religions so that its protagonist—and perhaps audience—will find some enlightenment at the climax.

As a societal outsider of the future, the character of Ismaeel is aware that in Pakistan he sticks out and notes every detail of the dominant Islamic culture, from ablution to the traditional *thobe* robes, and his unease in these environments. Some welcome comic sentiment creeps into the text, with Wali, Ismaeel's odd Pakistani driver uttering quips like, "I heard Mufti Sahib say the virgins come flying towards you when you have drunk enough water." Passages like this keep the book from taking itself too seriously.

Despite this and its spiritual ideas and concepts, *Over the Tightrope* suffers from lackluster prose to properly help complement the complex ideas it puts forth. Slightly adolescent similes like "he had more wrinkles than a man's scrotum" and some clichés like "her ... eyes shone like diamonds" prevent the mysterious ideas of *Over the Tightrope* from becoming better realized. Each page has solid construction, with Ismaeel encountering new characters and experiences regularly, but it lacks more semantic sophistication to better the plot overall.

Over the Tightrope is a curious and original narrative. It blurs the lines between the spirit world and reality, mixing fantasy and cosmic genres with an adventure story that, all and all, is a unique gumbo of a novel.

JAMES BURT (October 4, 2015)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.