



The Bruising of Qilwa

Naseem Jamnia

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Influenced by Persian culture, *The Bruising of Qilwa* is a stunning fantasy novella that confronts questions of belonging: to a culture, a family, and to yourself.

Nonbinary blood magic practitioner Firuz might be considered one of the lucky ones. They escaped the slaughter of other blood magic practitioners in their homeland and became a refugee with their family in the Free Democratic City-State of Qilwa. However, old tensions and prejudices linger, waiting for a chance to pounce, and the safety of Firuz and their family is tied to the whims of a fragile, war-torn society.

Still, Firuz finds comfort with a like-minded healer, Kofi, who gives them a job at his free clinic, and with Afsonah, an orphan refugee with powerful—if undisciplined—magic. When an unfamiliar plague begins to creep through Qilwa, Firuz's fears are realized: the government finds an easy scapegoat in the recent refugees. With a target on their back, Firuz challenges prejudice and perception to save the only home they and their family—born and found—have left.

The worldbuilding is immersive, with gripping descriptions of the sights and sounds of Qilwa jumping from the page. But the fantasy setting is not so impenetrable as to obscure the novel's real-world themes. Post-imperialism, colonization, and immigration are key elements of the text, and nuanced questions arise as power structures topple and invert. Within this shifting landscape of power, there are no easy answers, and characters are often led to the question of how many wrongs can still lead to a right.

Jamnia's queer-normative world is a welcome break from fantasy trends and tropes: people introduce themselves with pronouns without fanfare, and homophobia and transphobia as forms of oppression do not factor in.

Cracking the door to a fresh fantasy world, *The Bruising of Qilwa* makes an unforgettable first impression.

DANIELLE BALLANTYNE (July / August 2022)

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