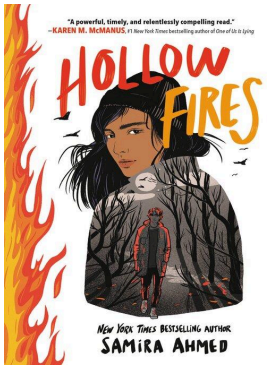
PERSONAL Book Review:

Hollow Fires by Samira Ahmed

Edited by Ivy Huang

OVERVIEW (NO SPOILERS)



Hollow Fires is a book I randomly found at the library and decided to read. It's about a senior girl named Safiya Mirza who wants to be a journalist, and she's the editor of her private school's newspaper. She believes that it's her job to dig deep for the facts without being affected by biases. The story follows Safiya as she investigates 14-year old Jawad Ali who was arrested, labeled a terrorist, and killed all because his teacher thought his cosplay jet pack was a bomb. It's worthy to note that Jawad, and Safiya as well, are Muslim and live in a town where people are biased toward "rich, white people," as they repeat throughout the story. This is told in the perspective of Safiya and Jawad, who's a ghost now, as Safiya investigates the traces behind Jawad's death.

PREJUDICE THEMES

For context, while bias against Muslims has always existed, it has especially increased since the 9/11 attacks in America. Terrorists, headed by Osama Bin Laden of the Muslim terrorist group Al-Qaeda, crashed into the Twin Towers, World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a field in Pennsylvania. This increased suspicion against Muslim and Islamic people. Today, some people are still weary of Muslims, stereotyping them as terrorists and such.

This book focuses on prejudice against Muslims today. In the book, Safiya investigates Jawad's disappearance, whose reputation was ruined after his arrest

even though he was let go innocent. Her school principal won't allow her to publish articles about it because he does not want the story to get out. She interrogates people associated with him, such as the teacher who accused him of having a bomb or his other teacher who was sympathetic and supportive of Jawad. You might be questioning the involvement of the authorities, but Safiya quickly discovers that the police are very unsupportive and uninterested in solving the case. When attempting to question the police for information, she and her friend get shut down by them. Especially when she suggests to the police that one of her classmates may have been involved in the disappearance, they are dismissed because the classmate she was referring to was the son of a rich, white family and are well-respected. Safiya learns to continue pushing for the truth even through oppressment, fear, and blatant racism.

Hollow Fires shows how acts of prejudice show through little and big actions of people and the chain of consequences they cause. They can cause people to go unseen, accused of things they didn't do, harmed, and even lead to death. Even in this article I can't capture what it can do. Muslim and Islam people are especially stereotyped because of the actions of terrorists and such that weren't actually them. We shouldn't judge people based on their ancestors' past actions, their race, religion, sexuality, and many other things. We should judge people based on how they are as a person.

PERSONAL NOTE

Now, admittedly there are many books and movies that share the message that we shouldn't be prejudice. This is a well-meaning theme, but why did I choose to write about this book specifically?

I'm Hindu American, and if you know anything about Indian history you know that Muslims and Hindus do not have a good history with each other. I think this is true but I'm not sure of the details, but a long time ago the Muslims came and destroyed thousands of pages of Hindu knowledge in India. That is one of the conflicts Hindus have with Muslims.

I live in a household where we are proud to be Hindu but dislike Muslims. I learned about this when I was around 11. I was told that Muslims are not to be trusted (they have specific references to Muslim friends they had that betrayed them in some way) and that they want to kill people who weren't Muslim or did not convert to it. Since I was young then, I believed it. Muslims did bad things to our people, and Pakistan, a Muslim country, is trying to take Kashmir from India. They are not trustable people.
I thought this was true until I brought it up to my friends, who pointed out that this was pretty prejudiced. Which short-circuited my brain as it went, *If I think Muslims are bad, it is prejudice, and prejudice is bad. But I should agree with parents because they are right.* Or something like that. From then on, I wondered how this could be. Then I decided I would drop the belief that Muslims were bad, but the damage is done, and I was still paranoid of them. I had to compare it to other situations–Christians hung people because they thought they were witches, but now most are still respected people. And white people have done terrible things, but we don't always glare at random white people. So some Muslims may have done terrible things, but that doesn't mean we punish all of them.

I've gone off-topic a little, but this is what the book helped me realize. We can't judge all for the actions of some. This applies to Muslims and all other people and minorities. We should slow down and consider things without bias. Be accepting. It hurts more to be against people for no good reason than to be accepting of all. I apologize to anyone who feels hurt or upset about what I've written, but I hope you realize that I'm trying to change.

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