A doescence isn’t easy for any-one, but for Aru Shah, who suddenly learns she’s part of an epic story out of Hindu mythology, being 12 years old is particularly challenging and wildly exciting. Aru is the titular character of Chokshi’s effervescent fantasy adventure, Aru Shah and the End of Time, the first of four books in her planned Pandava series and the launch title of the Rick Riordan Presents imprint from Disney-Hyperion.

In order to fit in at her posh middle school, Aru sometimes exagger- ates the truth. She has plenty of material at her fingertips: her mother curates the Museum of Ancient Indian Art and Culture, a treasure trove of archeological wonders. After her classmates dare her to light an ancient lamp called a diya, she releases a dangerous demonic entity, the Sleeper, who intends to unleash the Lord of Destruction. She also discovers that she is the reincarnation of one of the five sons of the Hindu god Pandu—and that the only way to save the world is to locate the other Pandava brothers.

Chokshi is the author of the young adult fantasies The Star Touched Queen and A Cinderella Story: Bad Cinderella, both of which al so draw on Hindu myths and folklore. But she’s also something of a crossover phenomenon. For one, her books appeal to girls. “I looked at my old yearbook, and died a thousand times in my imagination,” she says. She also admits that she used to be a lot like Aru. “I was always lying and getting trapped by something I probably shouldn’t have said, but I never get powers or a lightning bolt.”

To write Aru’s story, she delved deeply into the stories she grew up hearing in her bi-cultural Iranian and Filipino household. She has spent much of her life immersed in ancient India. Chokshi noted that translating Hindu myths is not a science, but an art. “It’s like being a translator—there is freedom to interpret the world. They tell us what to care about. They tell us what to care about.”

And she doesn’t see the focus on cultural sensitivity and politics being a passing trend. "I would call it a reaction to the way book publishers and film companies have been treating diverse cultures: 'It feels like I guzzled moonlight,' she says. 'Rick’s work has touched the hearts and sparked the imaginations of so many kids that I’m still floored that Aru gets a full-page feature in print and online. They tell us what to care about.”

— Roshani Chokshi

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