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## Magic, Myth, and Girl Power

Roshani Chokshi's new middle grade novel based on Hindu mythology launches the Rick Riordan Presents imprint

Adolescence isn't easy for anyone, 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 exaggerates 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 *dijiya*, 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.

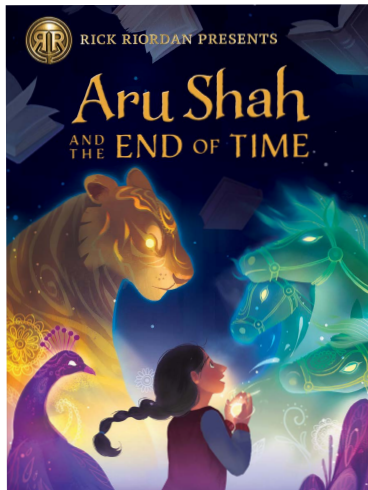
Chokshi is the author of the young adult fantasies *The Star Touched Queen* and *A Crooked Wish*, both of which also draw from Hindu myths and folklore. Chokshi counts the work of contemporaries Holly Black, Cathi Valente, and Laini Taylor as inspirations. *Aru Shah and the End of Time* is a departure for Chokshi as it's her first series title and moves into middle grade. In order to headspace of her 12-year-old protagonist, Chokshi stuck close to her own childhood, and drew from her old yearbook, and drew from her imagination, she also admits that she used to lie.

"I was always lying and trapped by something I probably shouldn't have said. But I never got powers or a lightning bolt."

To write Aru's story, she delved deeply into the stories she grew up hearing in her bicultural Indian and Filipino household,

of adventures but also because "Hindu mythology has a lot of fluidity to it. For example, one of the forms of the deity Vishnu is as Mohini, the Enchantress. Then there's the famous *Mahabharata* character Shikhandi, who, in many stories, is male but born female," she says.

Chokshi is overwhelmingly excited that her book is the first title in the Rick Riordan Presents program, which publishes middle grade fantasy stories from underrepresented cultures: "It feels like I guzzled moonlight," she says. "Rick's work has touched the hearts and sparked the imaginations of so many



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Mythology and fairy tales tell us how to interpret the world. They tell us what to care about.  
— Roshani Chokshi  
”

kids that I'm still floored that Aru gets to launch the imprint.

She applauds Riordan for his



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