



Beneath a Marble Sky

John Shors

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Journey to dazzling seventeenth-century Hindustan, where the reigning emperor, consumed with grief over the tragic death of his beloved wife, commissioned the building of a grand mausoleum as a testament to the marvel of their love. This monument would soon become known as the Taj Mahal - a sight famous around the world for its beauty and the emotions it symbolizes.

Princess Jahanara, the courageous daughter of the emperor and his wife, recounts their mesmerizing tale, while sharing her own parallel story of forbidden love with the celebrated architect of the Taj Mahal. Set during a time of unimaginable wealth and power, murderous sibling rivalries, and cruel despotism, this impressive novel sweeps you away to a historical Hindustan brimming with action and intrigue in an era when, alongside the brutalities of war and oppression, architecture and the art of love and passion reached a pinnacle of perfection.

Beneath a Marble Sky Details

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Author : John Shors

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From Reader Review Beneath a Marble Sky for online ebook

Olivia says

Just as precious jewels crowned the Taj Mahal, author John Shors has created a jewel and an impressive novel of love, honor, and betrayal. I think I've fallen in love with the author of this book. This book is so beautifully written, the language so concise and meaningful. For me, the novel was a fabulous reminder of how love truly should have no boundaries. One of the messages and teachings in the storyline is that to deny love is to deny God. I loved Jahanara's father, the Emperor, and what he did so that she could be fulfilled by and with love. Truly, and unquestionably, he did this out of love. Another reason I'm somewhat enamored with the author is that he is willing to talk to Book Clubs via speakerphone . . . just give him a call and he will arrange the meeting so that club members can talk to him directly. This is a beautiful piece of fiction.

Tonkica says

Gdje je ljubav nestala? Postovanje, iskrenost i kultura? Hvala sto postoji ova prica koja govori bas o tome!

4,5 jer je definitivno preduga! Komotno je moglo barem 100 stranica manje!

Leona says

A historical epic saga filled with deceit, betrayal, love and a soul searing passion that had me mesmerized. Brother set against brother, fighting for power and a place in history. A sister caught between two brothers and trapped in a loveless, brutal marriage. A Father incarcerated for 10 years by his own son. Yet in spite all the pain and suffering, a love emerges that transcends the bitterness.

Not for the faint of heart, but truly an enjoyable read.

Definitely a love story, not a romance. At 342 pages, this packed quite a punch.

Karla says

I'm still in rapture over this novel, it just was written with such perfection. The perfect read for any historical fiction fan. A concise and sweeping story, eloquently told. A tale of adventure, passion, and a journey into an intelligent and daring 17th Century daughter of the emperor. Jaha's struggle is a precarious one, caught between forbidden love, sibling rivalries and duty. A powerful thrilling edge of the seat page-turner. It taught me new things about the intricacies of architecture in 17th-century Hindustan. Eye opening moments as clever tid-bits about Hindu, Muslim and Islamic beliefs were added that were very interesting and beautiful to ponder. As well as having a passionate and emotional romance set during the backdrop of a murderous religious war. Everything I look for in great Fiction in only 345 pages. How is this possible?!?!

Zeek says

I picked up Beneath A Marble Sky because of the cover. I'm so glad I did. BAMS is a near perfect story. Love, hate, betrayal, intrigue, duty, honor, played out against the magnificent backdrop of Agra, India, the city of the Taj Mahal, - I fell in love with this story from page one.

Told in first person from Jahanara's point of view, I must confess to being pleasantly surprised that a male author could write a female character so well.

Perhaps that's a bit strong. What I mean is that Shors does an excellent job of making Jahanara- the central focus of the story- come to life. Her thoughts and motives were totally believable, and that's just not something I often feel is expressed well when a main female character is written by a man- especially when the entire story is from her POV.

Jahanara is a wonderful heroine. She is wise, intelligent, fearless, loyal and noble- and based on the real-life Daughter of the Emperor. Her story is woven into the tale of the building of the Taj Mahal, the grand Mausoleum built out of her father's love for her mother.

Things are not perfect for her; her arranged marriage to her burtish husband is a sham, and her power hungry brother is down right nasty. Things happen to her that make you want to scream, but, through her keen intelligence, she always manages to find a measure of revenge- no matter how hollow it feels in the end. And. She finds beauty and love in the darkest of places.

I feel the author does an excellent job of weaving fiction into actual historical events- and I came away learning something in the process. Yet the epic feel of it left you with no doubt you were reading fiction. (In fact, if it was longer and more overwrought, I'd put this up there with the novels that became TV mini series back in the day- think Thornbirds and Shogun!)

If you like historical fiction, especially historical fiction set in exotic locales, then this book is for you!

4.5 out of 5

Elyse says

What's, NOT to LOVE about "Beneath The Marble Sky"? It has the feeling of "Pillars of the Earth" without being a thousand pages long ---and without THOSE Pillers. (which by the way, *Pillars*...is one of my favorite books, as I love Ken Follett's historical fiction books)...

The Taj Mahal is nothing to be shy about! (Have you been???) I have!!! Its BREATH TAKING with its white marble ---semi precious stones, calligraphy and cavings, and of course that amazing 'teardrop'....etc.

This little book (344 pages) is cheaper than the flight to India (if if you do go to The Taj Mahal and know some of its history....this book is STILL GREAT), ---It can FEEL like you've taken the trip---- the Royal family tour... without leaving your home (put yourself into to the seventeenth century). Become one of the characters in the book ---for FUN---while reading it ---if you want. (of course I was THE PRINCESS)....lol

Do you want to be "The Princess" ---or The Emperor? Maybe the BAD brother? Maybe you have a passion for 'building' and want to pretend you're the architect of the Taj Mahal.....(better be a passionate loving male,)....lol.....etc. maybe you want to be a Cobra? ha ha...

This book is a GEM. THE PERFECT ENJOYABLE NOVEL!!!

And....

Got to have a ***Princess***

Got to have....

Heros....

Bruna Vrani?i? Vujevi? says

Izvanredna!!! 5+

Kristin says

This is a love story based in 17th century Hindustan - but not just your average love story. Finally, a love-story author that portrays a woman in a positive light! Not just hopelessly in love but also intelligent, loyal to her family (and her father's empire), truly selfless and very realistic with all of her emotional ups and downs.

This drama has the main character battling brothers and a disastrous arranged marriage, all the while fulfilling the needs of her father and trying to maintain a relationship with the man she truly loves.

I could not put this book down. It had action, drama, romance (without being too mushy), everything!

Sydney says

This is one of the most amazing books I've ever read. I am fascinated by books about other cultures. This historical fiction pick is set in India at the time the Taj Mahal was being built.

It delves into history, there's a love story, family struggles, drama, intrigue. This book has it all. I originally selected it because I ran a feature story on my newscast about the author, who will either call in to your book club, or, if your book club is big enough, he will make an appearance at your book club meeting. After selecting the book, I discovered the author had ties to Iowa (I have a special place in my soul for Midwestern authors).

This book swallowed me whole. The author wove such a beautiful story about the loves of the main character. Her love for her family and the duty she felt to honor them, her love for her country, and the love of her life... who wasn't the man to whom she was married.

It was emotionally wrenching at times, but a truly wonderful read.

Elizabeth says

What a beautiful book. So gracefully written, so emotional without over-doing it, it absorbed me from the first few pages.

There were absolutely some unpleasant situations, but I felt that they were handled as gently and tactfully as possible. They only increased the feeling that the main character/narrator Princess Jahanara was a woman of great strength and integrity.

I loved that there were no loose ends left at the end of the story. This book encapsulated the lives of the people in it, in almost their entirety. The author treated the deaths of those characters who perished with respect and dignity, but did not dwell on their ends, allowing the story to move along smoothly at all times. I enjoy a story in which the reader is allowed to know what happens to all the characters, to read about the later years of those who survived, and to understand that there is a lot more to life than happily-ever-after. This is such a book - it mimics life in that there is no one large conflict to be overcome, after which peace reigns; rather, the author shows that life is one flowing river of strife and blessings, which do manage to balance each other out in one way or another.

Shors is clearly a talented writer, as well as an insightful and wise human being. I would recommend this book to any adult who believes in love and the sacredness of the human spirit.

Melodie says

After having read favorable reviews, I was looking forward to this book. I am not very well versed in the history of early India so this would be a learning experience for me. And indeed the tale of the conception and construction of the Taj Mahal was fascinating. The struggle for power among siblings and the ensuing brutal wars between Muslim and Hindi people was interesting as well.

But I really struggled to stay focused and finish this book. There was sooo very much excessively descriptive language. The Taj Mahal demanded such description, every minute of every day did not. I found myself skimming all the descriptive passages to get on with the story. It was like watching a soap opera. you can skip a week or two and still pick up right where you left off. It took away from a compelling story.

Sandra Baši? says

O izgradnji Taj Mahala manje-više svi znamo a ova je pri?a ispri?ana iz kuta Jahanare, k?eri hindustanskog cara Shaha Jahana i carice Mumtaz Mahal. To je pri?a o muškarcu koji je zbog smrti svoje voljene odlu?io izgraditi veli?anstveni mauzolej, kao simbol njihove velike ljubavi. Pri?a je to i o nesretnoj ženi udatoj po carevoj naredbi, koja se nije bojala zaljubiti unato? zakonima koji za preljub imaju samo jednu kaznu – smrt.

„Mnogi se boje smrti. Ali ja ne. Jer sam osjetila jedinstvo koje zovemo ljubavlju. Smrt ju ne može ukrasti. Niti ublažiti. Ne, ja ?u svoju ljubav ponijeti sa sobom kamo god pošla. I trajat ?e vje?no.“

Osim ljubavi, autor nam pokazuje kako može nastati prijateljstvo izme?u carevne i roba, kojeg u javnosti ne

možeš zvati svojim prijateljem ili imati prijateljicu druge vjere koja je spremna doslovno umrijeti za tebe. U današnje doba, teško mogu zamisliti takvu priču. Kao i u mnogim carskim obiteljima, i ova ima svoju crnu ovcu u liku Aurangzeba, pretendenta na prijestolje, razmetnog sina koji ne preza ni pred čime kako bi to i ostvario.

Autor je sve ove odnose tako vješto isprepleo jednim vrlo jednostavnim stilom a sadržajno toliko bogatim. Kako i sam kaže, roman je napisao na temelju povijesnih činjenica iako je sama priča izmišljena. A meni se jako sviđjala upravo ovakva kakva je, tako da čitatelja može uvjeriti da se sve tako i dogodilo. Ljubav Jahanare i njenog dragog Ise, graditelja Taj Mahala je ono što se sigurno dugo pamti i kad se sklopi knjiga.

„Mi zajedno rastemo, Lastavice. Ne starimo, već rastemo. – Ali moja ljepota neće potrajati. – Tvoja ljepota? Ljepota je osjećaj, a osjećaji su vječni.“

Mileto says

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Darshana says

i do not recommend this book, as it could give the reader an inaccurate picture of what life was like back then. in addition the author has taken a number of liberties with the historical characters. the writing is very simplistic and leaves you feeling like you are reading a teenage romance novel.

Skip says

After really enjoying Shors' *Temple of a Thousand Faces*, the fictionalized, but well researched story of Cambodia's Ankor Wat, I have wanted to read this book about the Taj Mahal. It did not disappoint. The story is told by the clever Princess Jahanara, eldest daughter of Emperor Shah Jahan and his beloved Mumtaz Mahal, describing the treacherous battle for succession in India, her loveless politically-arranged marriage, and her falling in love with the architect of the mausoleum for her deceased mother. Their faithful eunuch servant and her closest female friend are strong characters and great allies. The religious tension between the ruling Muslims and the majority Hindus was well handled, but introduced late, in my opinion.

Samia says

I was kind of disappointed that most of it is fiction (or at least the most important parts that form the basis of the story). You are thought to believe that this is based on a true story, but it is highly embellished, and culturally inaccurate in many cases. It kind of ruined the mystery of the Mughal Empire, the Taj Mahal, etc. for me. It is an easy read though, and somewhat entertaining, so if you like these sorts of love stories (but

more on the side of a melodramatic soap opera) then you'll probably enjoy it.

Amy says

A melodramatic tale that plays fast and loose with historical accuracy and the reader's patience.

I knew going in this would probably not enjoy this book, but I hoped I might anyway. Forbidden love and angst are two things I like to avoid...but India! The Taj Mahal! Historical fiction! Political intrigue! Had to be worth trying, right?

Ehhh, not so much. I didn't learn much about the creation of the Taj Mahal and I'm skeptical of the little I did learn.

The characters are either Good or Evil. Good characters are modern and tolerant in their attitude towards life and other religions. Evil ones are Evil because...plot? There is no in-between. The heroine - the reader is constantly reminded - is beautiful and cunning and wise (but is she really? 'Cause I feel like she does a lot of Dumb Stuff.) The men around her - The Good ones - love and admire her. The Evil ones underestimate her and treat her like dirt, especially her husband.

Although Princess Jahanara's husband plays a main role as a villain in her life, I could never take him seriously. He treats her like dirt and everyone responds with a 'sucks to suck' attitude instead of doing something about it. The "modern" attitudes of most of the characters jars oddly with this nonchalant attitude towards her husband.

However, I'd say that describes most of this book. The author wants it both ways. You're to admire the modern attitudes of the characters but also unquestionably accept their inexplicable behavior as cultural or fitting the time.

On top of annoying characters and plot points that seem to exist only to add drama, this book is rife with gratuitous sex scenes. The reader is subjected to Jahanara's husband's boorish sex and her lover's boring sex. Honestly, I feel like I should be more annoyed with this part of the plot but it was too boring even to be infuriating.

If this book had been shorter, I might feel more patient with it, but instead I feel frustrated. This could have been something great; the writing is interesting enough. It sacrifices an actually interesting environment, however, for cheap romance between one-dimensional Good characters and throws equally lifeless Evil Characters at them for Drama. It is really quite a pity.

Sara Register says

I found this book pretty fascinating as well as disturbing...and not in a good way. I have noticed that since having children, I don't do well with violence in books. This book has some pretty blatant violence in it that was hard for me to read. (I'm sure it really isn't THAT bad, I just am ultra sensitive to it, especially when it has to do with children--there is a lot of castration and war and executions etc...) I had to read another "light" book while reading this one because it affected me so much. John Shors does a great job however of painting a vivid picture of India during the time of the building of the Taj Mahal. He also does a great job of writing characters that you feel you actually get to know. You really love the good guys and you really despise the bad guys. I love books like that, where the characters come to life. If you are wanting a book with great closure and a happy ending though, don't look here.

Stacey says

I love historical fiction because I feel like I'm learning something while entertaining myself, which is great since I never paid attention in Social Studies in high school. I saw this book described online as "historical romance," and if you think of it like that, it's easier to stomach a lot of the nonsense in here. For instance, this is the kind of story where the main characters literally "chase one another through fields of wheat," "frolic on the sand," and "make love beneath the stars." Regardless, it's a good story, easy to read, and the setting and culture are really fascinating. It's also just a good old-fashioned epic tale with heroes and villains and action, which is a nice change once in a while.

It inspired me to look up some things about the Taj Mahal and this royal family when I was finished reading it. Sadly, it seems like the narrator's real life was actually far more interesting than this book lets on. She's construed as a victim here--a strong one, but a victim nonetheless--whereas multiple websites called her "the most powerful woman in all of India," and "a skilled painter, poet, and designer" none of which the book mentions. I guess it didn't have time for all that since she had so much frolicking and chasing and lovemaking to do. It's criminal, really. John Shors took a woman who was truly ahead of her time, who was a goodwill ambassador, a traveler, an artist, a businesswoman, and a civil rights advocate, and turned her into a damsel in distress in a mediocre romance novel. He tries to make her all feisty and strong-willed as a character, but ultimately it's all about her affair with this architect, which probably didn't even happen. I would classify this as a good beach read, but not a must-read.

aPriL does feral sometimes says

'Beneath a Marble Sky' is much too much about a royal daughter's dutiful life of self-sacrifice - she practically gets ecstatic when she discovers a sacrifice situation actually - than I could accept. The combination of silly pointless self-sacrifices and the way her breathless love in the shadows unfolded struck me as impossibly bizarre. She did so very little to protect herself at important junctures, in the name of love. It also appeared to me she often relied heavily on the kindness or wisdom of men - family and strangers - even after she wised up. But her desire to suffer seemed to depend a lot on her ecstatic expectation of salvation in the next world, if nothing else. She did her best to be abnormally nice at all times. By the time I was halfway into the book, I hated this self-immolating woman. It was a GR club pick, so, well, here we are.

Many actual historical details are mixed into 'Beneath a Marble Sky', although it uses as its primary foundation a fictional depiction of an illicit romance between the married royal girl and an unmarried foreign commoner, which so satisfied many other readers. I am giving it a couple of stars only because of the history and political details myself.

As I read this novel, I thought narrator Princess Jahanara was somewhat unwilling to exercise much logical capacity, although in time she began to be more strategic, even if she still always chose the path of self-sacrifice if it was available to her. She seemed mostly pedestrianly kitsch in thought, and appeared to me to suffer a lot from purposeful blinkered vision because of her persistence of belief in being a good girl. She often prevented her young psychopathic warrior brother, Aurangzeb, from hurting her pathetically silly older brother and the heir-apparent to the throne, Dara. She saw Aurangzeb's joy in killing even when he was a little boy. But she is determined to make nice and worked at maintaining surface conventionality, even if it killed her. Everything she does is about maintaining internal family coherence, whatever the personal cost (and against all common sense in my opinion). The delusion that all the members of her famous royal family felt nothing but supportive affection with each other, or that they would all be nice enough given time, to eventually all meet in heaven I suppose, was important to her? Even as she covered up or minimized Aurangzeb's malevolent behavior every day since their childhood...

Now you know why I mostly disliked this novel - irrational main character. Moving on.

As the story of her life as a royal Princess in 17th-century India unfolds, readers also enjoy a well-researched, if brief, look at the politics and the enormous accumulated wealth of the ruling family that built the Taj Mahal. Yes, gentle reader, THAT Taj Mahal! For Princess Jahanara is the daughter of Shah Jahan, who built the Taj Mahal as a giant tomb for his favorite wife, Mumtaz Mahal, after she died in childbirth (not mentioned in the novel, but in fact it was Mumtaz Mahal's fourteenth pregnancy).

Princess Jahanara is reluctant to step outside most of the lines of propriety and cultural expectations, no matter what, because of her love for her father and secondarily, her Muslim faith, except of course for the passionate love affair she begins with a young handsome architect - a Persian, Ustad Isa. He was hired to help design and build the Taj Mahal.

Jahanara hates her husband, the merchant Khondamir, an ugly fat vile old yellow-toothed infertile mouthbreather. Shah Jahan, Jahanara's beloved father, arranged the child marriage of his fifteen-year-old daughter to the middle-aged merchant in affectionate hope Jahanara would grow to love him. However, now that the Shah sees she can't love Khondamir, he kindly arranges for the unmarried Persian architect Isa to consort with his daughter in secret.

Hmmmmmm.

Gentle reader, I know it may surprise you, but this isn't the moment I decided that this novel was asinine. There was an incident a few chapters before this that was insane. However, in case you are in the apparent majority that adores this novel or wants to adore this novel, I will exercise some discretion and place it in a spoiler box.

(view spoiler)

This book went off the rails for me. I lost all interest in being worried about the dangers where sweet but too-stupid-to-live Princess Jahanara's apparent problem of masochism would lead her. Bite me.

Anyway.

The Wikipedia link below is to the real history of Jahanara's father, the Emperor of Hindustan, Shah Jahan:

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taj_M...

This link is to a video of the author John Shors explaining his pleasure at the success of this novel and some of his thinking in writing it:

<https://youtu.be/GD09tyPUdHU>
