

SHORTLISTED SYNOPSIS

The Principles of Moments by Esmie Jikiemi-Pearson

In self-deified Emperor Thracin's brave new galaxy, Humans are not citizens. Instead, they are laborers indentured to the empire, working to repay the billions in debt they unwittingly incurred when they settled on Gahraan—a planet already owned by someone else.

Asha Akindele has lived her whole life on Gahraan, eking out an existence between factory assembly lines and constant terror—studying stolen aeronautics manuals in the dead of night and trying not to get herself killed for mouthing off to a guard. Then she discovers she has a sister imprisoned by the Emperor, and is forced to make a choice: stay enslaved, but relatively safe, or escape and risk everything in the name of family.

Obi Amadi is a time-traveller, sick with a legendary disease. Armed only with his prosthetic arm, his ever-constant melancholy, and the humour he uses to mask it, he has spent years travelling through time and space in search of a cure for the sickness currently unmaking him limb by limb. His mandate: Find the cure, go home. And maybe figure out along the way if the prince he thinks sometimes he might love could be that home.

When Obi saves Asha's life, they make a pact: both will do all they can to get the other to the Emperor's stronghold unscathed. With the reluctant aid of Xavior, a mouthy deckhand with a mysterious past, Asha and Obi attempt to navigate a galaxy that hates them to find the things they both believe will make them whole.

But a prophecy has started that has other plans, and not only is Asha forced to make a terrible choice, she must soon reckon with the legacy of an ancient religion and its heroes, who may be awakening, reincarnated in ways beyond her comprehension.

The Reeves' Guild by Kyla Jardine

Leif is a Special Intelligence Officer in MI5, working for a nearly forgotten and under-resourced unit called The Reeves' Guild. Their remit is the protection of domestic national security against supernatural threats. But with magical crimes at an all-time low in the 21st century, Leif's dreams of action and adventure disappear into a life of humdrum administration and policing petty misdemeanours.

When Leif is ordered to investigate the brutal murder of an elite occultist, he jumps at the chance to work a real case and show his boss that he can solve the crime quickly and quietly, finally proving he's true Secret Service material. Navigating a problematic working relationship with the Metropolitan Police, the investigation proves to be a tricky one... possibly the first case of murder by magic The Reeves' Guild has encountered in centuries. But how can Leif defend against an enemy using magic when Reeves are forbidden from using it? And, why has the Director General of MI5 taken a sudden interest in both him and the case?

As more of London's magical community fall victim to the murderer, two women's lives are turned upside down when they are caught up in the case... and with disturbing consequences. As the investigation deepens, it isn't long before Leif uncovers a threat to Crown and country; one that is closer than the Reeves ever imagined.

Blood of the Wolf by Jaya Martin

Anoushka isn't just an ordinary sixteen-year-old as she is made to believe. She is unaware that she is a very powerful Mage protected by a spell that has contained her magic from birth. Hidden away to

live a mundane, poverty-stricken life, she works as a chambermaid in Castle Greycrag until one fateful day, when everything changes. She is falsely accused of stealing a diamond necklace and if caught will face a death penalty. While trying to escape she accidentally breaks the protective spell and unknowingly uses magic in self-defence. Greycrag is a land where magic is totally forbidden and punishable by death. With two death sentences threatening her life, Anoushka is forced to flee and seek refuge in Dragonden, a neighbouring country where magic is allowed.

Though her journey is fraught with dangers, betrayals and uncertainties, she eventually arrives in Dragonden, but is caught and taken to Lord Yariq, the ruler of Dragonden. Yariq offers her a choice: get sent back to Greycrag to be hanged or help in a secret rescue mission to gain her freedom. Anoushka sees this as her only chance at survival. So she signs a binding contract using her blood though she is unskilled, untrained and inexperienced.

The mission is to rescue Nemoutis, the crown prince of Lupinlair, being held captive by Lord Odious – a Mage so dark and evil that none dares to cross his path. Odious plans to offer Nemoutis as a human sacrifice to gain immeasurable powers to conquer the world. For Anoushka, failure is not an option if she wants to live. And when she confronts the evil that threatens much more than Nemoutis' life, she realises her hidden destiny and that she must risk her own life to save the fate of the world.

Kali's Call by Dolly Garland

In Bharat, the humans have created a large federation of allied provinces. In a half-forgotten corner of the realm are the demigods, Gandharvas, shrouded in myths and legends. While Asuras, the demon race, continue their efforts for taking control of the land.

Avantika, the Princess of Gandharvan, is committed to helping her father, Maharaja Kashyap, bring their dying race back into the world. But their well-laid plans are turned on its head when Avantika feels Kali's call - the goddess her people consider an enemy and do not worship.

Unable to ignore the call, Avantika runs away to the teeming metropolis of Kathan and enters Kali's Order by pretending to be a human. As Avantika embarks on a path that brings her closer to Kali, she discovers that everything her people had believed about the goddess was wrong and that their real enemy was much closer to home.

Joined by Shivani, a warrior in Kali's Order who has sworn to protect her, Avantika heads home to Gandharvan to tell her people the truth. But she returns to find her father murdered, and her people despondent. While her brother is lost in his grief, the man who seems to be holding things together is a human merchant from Kathan, Sahil, who had come to make a trade agreement but found himself in the middle of a war no one saw coming.

Now with Shivani and Sahil's help, Avantika must fight for not just the survival of her race, but for the safety of the mortal realm. However, the war she has to fight may be the biggest betrayal of all. A war against gods. Fought not with weapons, but with the destruction of long-held beliefs and of pure, unfaltering love.

Nowhere more Changeable than the Mortal Heart by Ewen Ma

City H is on the brink of destruction.

The discovery of several undetonated Second World War-era bombs buried deep below the ground becomes the catalyst for disaster. University reporter Prosper is swept up in the

wildstorm of tensions that ensue, even as he befriends the fiery, troubled Kit at the scattered excavation sites in City H. With their world crumbling in front of their eyes, Prosper and Kit seek an escape from the horrors of the present and attempt to build a fragile sanctuary among the ruins of everything they once knew to be true.

City H is dead.

On a train out from Berlin one chilly morning, Demy comes across the last person she ever expected to see again: her dead brother's closest friend, beaten bloody and half-unconscious on a station platform yet unnoticed by any of the other passengers. He flees before Demy can speak to him but leaves behind a single object: a camera that should not exist. Against her will Demy is pulled back into a city she swore never to return to, even as her entanglement with the past breaks open old guilts and unspoken resentments.

City H never existed.

The man wakes to find himself lost in a labyrinth of towers. He knows that he is being hunted in this strange, disorienting smoke world, but by whom and for what, he has no idea. The only certainty he has of who he is comes from a photograph in his pocket: a blurred photograph of himself, the letter K. scrawled in black ink on the back of it. Yet as he discovers cryptic postcards, yellowing ticket stubs, and torn posters of films and concerts from a city he is certain never existed, he also finds himself caught in a dangerous game-- a cat and mouse chase against the world itself.

Seeds of Heaven by Victor Organa

EZE (17) is a carpenter and second-generation immigrant visiting the great city of Akijia with his family. They are eager to see the Queen at the market during her annual city tour, but an assassination is attempted. Eze suffers untold personal loss during the ensuing chaos, accidentally takes an ancient seed of power released by the blood of the Queen.

Eze leaves home with what's left of his family - along with their unassuming neighbour. As they search for a new home, they are marked, and they are hounded. Eze is a wanted man because the authorities have marked him as a suspect in the Queen's death, and the assassins have marked him as a thief of the seed of power they sought. Eze, amidst all this attention, is cursed with power he does not understand that will either kill him or save his family.

CHEENA (20) is an apprentice of magic, present during the attack at the market. She also suffered great loss and blames herself for both the deaths of her mistress and her queen. She'd helped Eze's family escape death during the chaos and must now abandon her future as a promising reaper, abandon her home and her teachers. She must find the infamous runaway and bring him to justice.

PRINCE VASKE (44) of the forgotten lands of Kronog is haunted by the ghost of his dead son. In the depths of his doldrums, he learns of his father-in-law who's gone missing along with four hundred Kronogian soldiers. And it appears that this disappearance is part of a plot that involves the city of Akijia. Now Vaske must overcome his personal demons and negotiate a situation that threatens to throw his nation into chaos. His actions could have far-reaching consequences for Cheena and for Eze.

The Scent of Cloves by Dan Buchanan

Returning to her home in the Rwenzori Mountains, Arbiter Bahira Solomon is swiftly thrust into the middle of the millennia-old crisis quietly building in the heart of vampire society. There are traitors in the south, a government is dead, and the species is a curious headline away from exposure.

Worse, Magistrate Sadhana Chavda, leader of the Jurat and Bahira's long-time mentor, is deeply implicated in the plot. Before she abdicates, Sadhana appoints her protege successor and turns herself over for sedition. As the new and untested Magistrate, Bahira's first obstacle is to weather the gathering storm about to break over her world. Robbed of any options but action, she pools the considerable resources of both vampire and human jurisprudence to build a framework that will hold up against the Jurat tenets of fairness, neutrality, and justice.

Her verdict, when it comes, is final: treason. Sentence? Death. A rare thing in history, vampire killing vampire — a watershed moment. But by the time the guilty are lined up to await their punishment, including her teacher, Bahira has taken the measure of her own authority, and wears it well. She does not flinch when the cold stares of the executioners settle on her, awaiting the signal. She does not hesitate when she gives it. Does not look away as her kin burn, the catalyst of events that would change Earth forever. Bahira Solomon, last Magistrate of the Jurat, knows the only way now is forward.

The Shape of the World by Amy Borg

The Shape of the World is an epic YA fantasy with touches of sci-fi that follows one girl's mission to find her vanished mentor by joining an ancient order of monster-slaying heroes.

On the deserted island of Nilaya, surrounded by endless ocean, there are no cities. There are no kings or castles, no cloudships or mistsea monsters — none of the wonders that fourteen-year-old Song dreams of one day seeing. With only her fussy Caretaker for company, Song lives for visits from Lan, her teacher and mentor, who brings her stories of the Verse beyond her island and of the Cantors, the heroes who protect it.

That is, until Lan forgets her fifteenth birthday.

Desperate to figure out what happened to him, Song seeks a way to escape her island, putting her trust in a mysterious boy who brings her the dire warning that Lan is in danger, and that the fate of the Cantors may depend on Song being able to find him. But rebellion is brewing at the edge of the Verse. As Song seeks to rescue Lan, delving deeper into the power that connects her to the Cantors and their legacy, she soon learns how thin the line between hero and monster can be.