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# The Gauntlet



## Synopsis

A trio of friends from New York City find themselves trapped inside a mechanical board game that they must dismantle in order to save themselves and generations of other children in this action-packed debut that's a steampunk Jumanji with a Middle Eastern flair. Nothing can prepare you for *The Gauntlet*. It didn't look dangerous, exactly. When twelve-year-old Farah first laid eyes on the old-fashioned board game, she thought it looked elegant. It is made of wood, etched with exquisite images of a palace with domes and turrets, lattice-work windows that cast eerie shadows, a large spider and at the very center of its cover, in broad letters, is written: *The Gauntlet of Blood and Sand*. The Gauntlet is more than a game, though. It is the most ancient, the most dangerous kind of magic. It holds worlds inside worlds. And it takes players as prisoners.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Karuna Riazi is a born and raised New Yorker, with a loving, large extended family and the rather trying experience of being the eldest sibling in her particular clan. Besides pursuing a BA in English literature from Hofstra University, she is an online diversity advocate, blogger, and publishing intern. Karuna is fond of tea, baking new delectable treats for friends and family to relish, Korean dramas, and writing about tough girls forging their own paths toward their

destinies. The Gauntlet is her first novel.

I have never been more grateful for a protagonist that knows how to survive a fantasy novel. In this case, Farah is aware of stories where younger brothers disappear and games come to life. Even so, her aunt's (accidental) birthday present of a magical board game catches her off-guard. Usually Farah has to play games with her baby brother Ahmad all the time and let him win. When she tries to play with her friends instead of with her brother, a spoiled and sulky Ahmad insists on entering the game's magical world. To save him, Farah and her friends must enter and beat the game. If they lose, they stay within it forever. There is just one problem, however; the game doesn't play fair. Farah has to handle a cheating opponent, and a constantly shifting wonder. The Gauntlet is a lot of fun to read, and a rollicking adventure. Rather than a morality tale, since Farah is already a magnificent big sister and Ahmad's too little to learn from his brattiness, we get an exploration of Bengali culture and temporal consequences. The character changes are subtler, where Farah has to rally her friends and develop nerves of steel. Aunt Zorah can only watch from the outside, while the adults trapped within the game hope they can finally leave their artificial home. Sometimes we just need a grand high adventure, that teaches us more about our world.

Perfect for middle grade adventure and fantasy fans, especially for readers who love The Land of Stories series by Chris Colfer, and for board game fans of Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library by Chris Grabenstein. I greatly appreciated Farah's strong female lead and the Bangladeshi cultural influences/references that make this a refreshing addition to the middle grade fantasy world. The only cons are that there were times when the dialogue felt a bit flat, and Farah's friends Alex and Essie could have possibly had deeper characters and more involvement in the story. These are minor, however, and I look forward to reading more from Riazai - perhaps in future installments of Farah's story?

An excellent book with great characters, the story kept me on my toes and crossing my fingers the whole time. Karuna Riazai has crafted a great story with nice tidbits that make the Muslim main character relatable and interesting, and kept me googling little details to learn more about the culture she grew up in. I learned things and enjoyed this book a lot, and can't wait for Riazai to release another book!

Beautifully written with lots of fun alliteration and a great example of the sibling bond. Riazai

masterfully interweaves characters' backgrounds and memories into the present adventure. It's exciting to see a MG book with a Muslim main character - especially a headscarf wearing girl - that is allowed to be a young girl watching out for her brother, acknowledging what being Muslim does to the story, but not making it what the story is about.

The Gauntlet is one of my favorite debut novels from this year - how often do we get to read an adventure story reminiscent of Jumanji with a hijabi heroine? Riazi has a great sense of place, tension, and dialogue, and has created an all-ages adventure that will satisfy younger readers, provide representation for characters who don't often receive it outside of narrow and stereotyped windows, and give older readers a chance to re-enter imaginative worlds. Given that this is Riazi's first published novel, I think we can expect great things from her in the future!

A wondrous, fantastical read that sucked me into the story the way Farah and her friends were pulled into the dangerous game! I grew up with Jumanji - I even own the board game! - and this book was both nostalgic and gorgeously original. I'm so thrilled to see a strong, smart, determined young Muslim girl at the heart and soul of the story, and all of the side characters were well-written and fleshed out. The book is a rollercoaster ride... hang on tight as Farah and Co. battle against the mysterious Architect and search for her missing brother. I would definitely recommend this to anyone looking for a thrilling, fast-paced read with a dynamic and diverse heroine leading the way!

The Gauntlet is an entertaining and exciting adventure for middle grade readers.

Asalaamu Alaykum, I just got it today, but I have already started reading it to my kids, it is so far a great book and I love that the little girl is a hijabi, Alhamdulillah.

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