

Dear Reader,

*Sona and the Golden Beasts* is set in an imaginary world, but its themes are very much inspired by our own.

As an Indian American, I have always struggled with the British occupation of India, when Britain drained India's resources and people for centuries before finally being shamed into leaving. But I grew up loving British literature, especially the Chronicles of Narnia and Lord of the Rings series. And as I reflected on my personal history, I knew that I might not be the person I am if the British had not been in India—my parents would most likely not have spoken English, and they might not have immigrated to the United States. Still, I couldn't wrap my mind around one country's exploitation of another. When I went to England and saw the statue of Queen Victoria, Empress of India and the jewels and other treasures that had been stolen, I was dismayed that these symbols of imperialism continue to exist. I drew upon those feelings for this book.

Another part of the inspiration for this story came a few years ago, when I was shocked by the opening scene in the *Watchmen* TV series. Horrific and historically accurate, it depicted events from the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921. How had I never heard of this important piece of American history? I started to think about who gets to tell the history of a country, and I used that idea in this book as well.

Finally, I thought about exploring climate change in a fantasy setting: What would the earth say if it could literally speak to us?

I hope you enjoy my first fantasy novel, one that explores the horrors of greed and the wonders of love. I hope it helps us all draw upon our greatest strengths—kindness, respect, and empathy—to help us heal what is broken in our own world.

Yours,

Rajani LaRocca