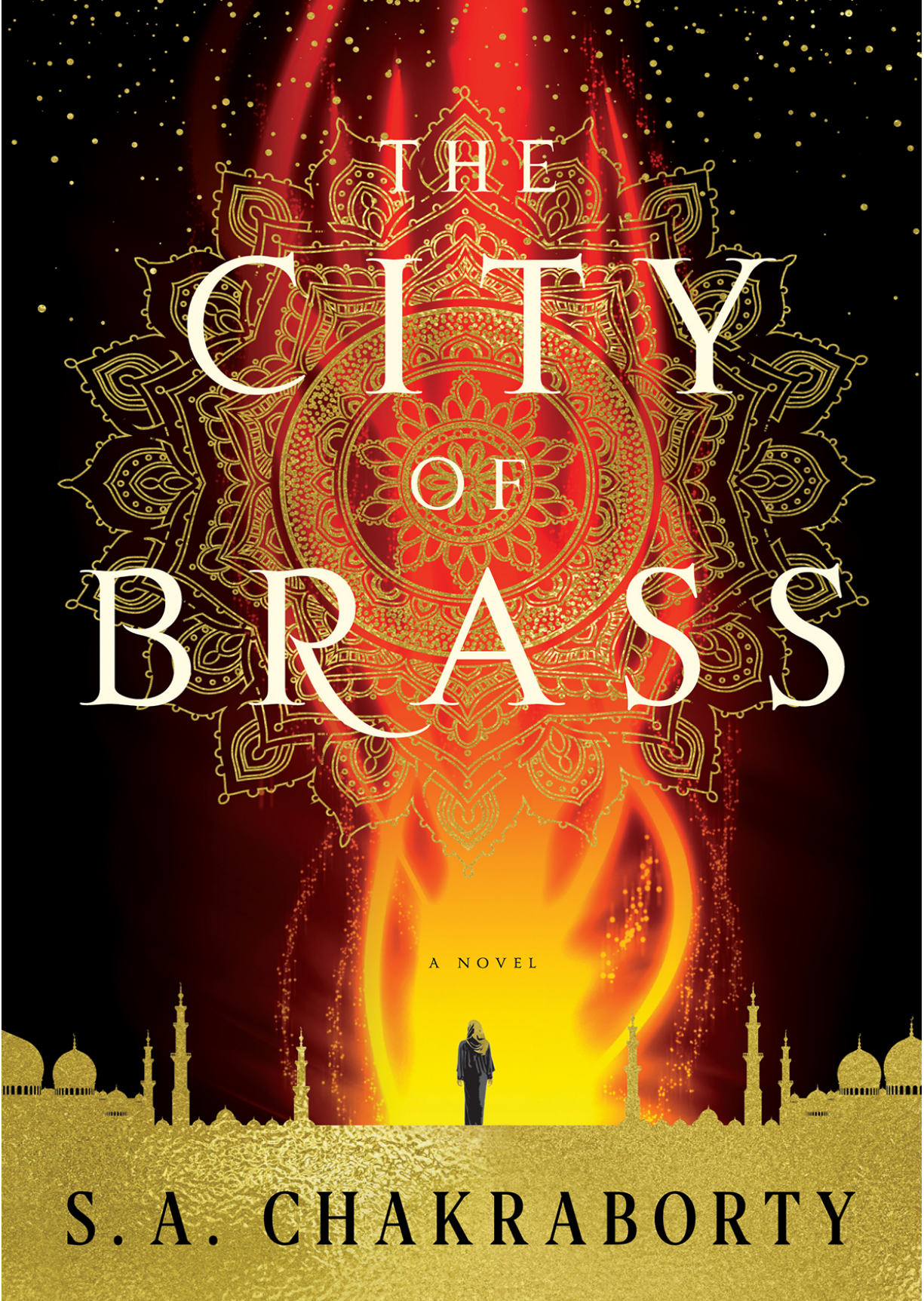


THE
CITY
OF
BRASS

A NOVEL



S. A. CHAKRABORTY



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 HARPER Voyager
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Dedication

For Alia, the light of my life

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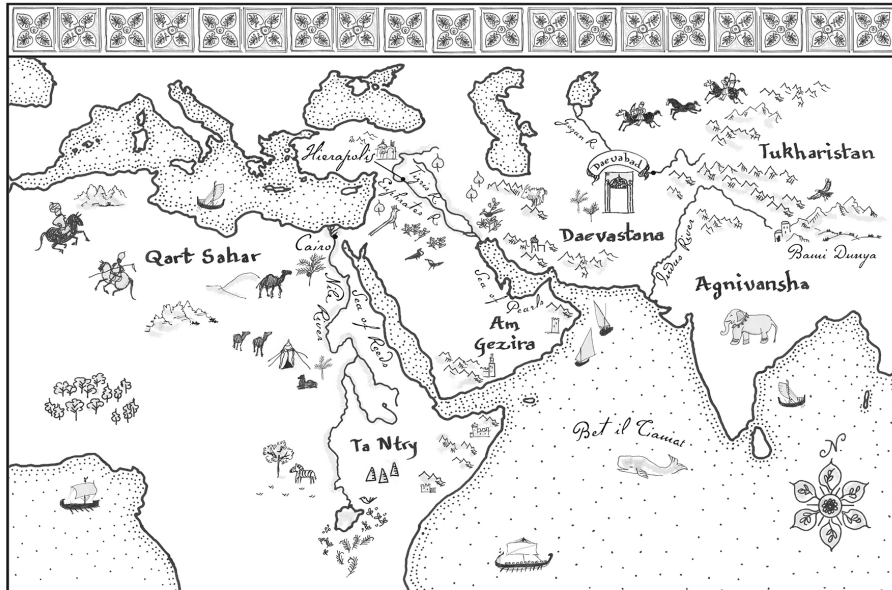
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Map



1

Nahri

He was an easy mark.

Nahri smiled behind her veil, watching the two men bicker as they approached her stall. The younger one glanced anxiously down the alley while the older man—her client—sweated in the cool dawn air. Save for the men, the alley was empty; fajr had already been called and anyone devout enough for public prayer—not that there were many in her neighborhood—was already ensconced in the small mosque at the end of the street.

She fought a yawn. Nahri was not one for dawn prayer, but her client had chosen the early hour and paid handsomely for discretion. She studied the men as they approached, noting their light features and the cut of their expensive coats. Turks, she suspected. The eldest might even be a basha, one of the few who hadn't fled Cairo when the Franks invaded. She crossed her arms over her black abaya, growing intrigued. She didn't have many Turkish clients; they were too snobbish. Indeed, when the Franks and Turks weren't fighting over Egypt, the only thing they seemed to agree on was that the Egyptians couldn't govern it themselves. God forbid. It's not as though the Egyptians were the inheritors of a great civilization whose mighty monuments still littered the land. Oh, no. They were peasants, superstitious fools who ate too many beans.

Well, this superstitious fool is about to swindle you for all you're worth, so insult away. Nahri smiled as the men approached.

She greeted them warmly and ushered them into her tiny stall, serving the elder a bitter tea made from crushed fenugreek seeds and coarsely chopped