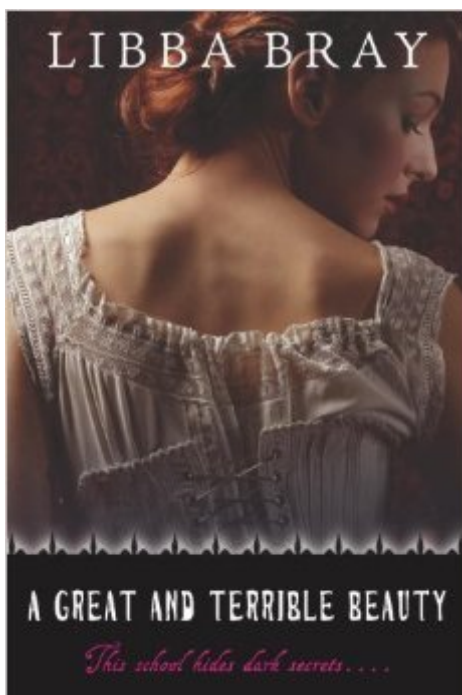


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# A Great And Terrible Beauty (The Gemma Doyle Trilogy)



## Synopsis

It's 1895, and after the suicide of her mother, 16-year-old Gemma Doyle is shipped off from the life she knows in India to Spence, a proper boarding school in England. Lonely, guilt-ridden, and prone to visions of the future that have an uncomfortable habit of coming true, Gemma's reception there is a chilly one. To make things worse, she's been followed by a mysterious young Indian man, a man sent to watch her. But why? What is her destiny? And what will her entanglement with Spence's most powerful girls—and their foray into the spiritual world—lead to? From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 760L (What's this?)

Series: The Gemma Doyle Trilogy

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Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars— See all reviews— (600 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #62,333 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #51 in Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > Europe #1958 in Books > Teens > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Fantasy #2274 in Books > Children's Books > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Fantasy & Magic

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

I picked up this book on a whim because the premise seemed interesting. A Great and Terrible Beauty is one of the most beautiful historical and gothic novels I have read in a while. The story enthralled me from beginning to end. Sixteen-year-old Gemma Doyle is different from the other girls at the London boarding school she lives in after her mother's tragic and strange death in India. In addition to not having the conformist mentality that girls of her class and station are trained to have, Gemma has a deep, dark problem that she does not know how to control. She has visions of tragic things that come true and has the magic key to enter an alternate place called the Realms, where

every desire -- as well as every nightmare -- can come true. When she finds the diary of a girl with similar powers, she learns about a secret society called the Order, and she and three friends decide to explore the magical and strange world. But there are things that Gemma doesn't know about, secrets and mysteries that she will have to figure out on her own. And she tries to do this while a rather strange Indian boy keeps an eye on her and demands that she put a stop to her visions. There are various twists throughout the novel. *A Great and Terrible Beauty* is the sort of novel that you cannot put down because there are so many elements, so many layers that make the novel compelling and enthralling. I loved the backdrop of Victorian England and the way women were viewed and what was expected from them in those times. The female characters spoke volumes about this particularly difficult time period for women. Pippa's desire to meet the perfect prince touched me. She is a very flawed character, but with dreams and desires that spoke to me. Felicity is also quite a complex character. She was a loyal friend and an innocent at times and was cruel, despicable and disturbing in others. Gemma is a great heroine. She had the sort of confusions and issues that girls at present time could definitely relate to. There was a naivete quality to her voice that made her all the more compelling. The gothic aspect of the novel is the perfect complement for the time setting. The horror aspect of the novel were chilling at times. The story became very fanciful about halfway through the novel, but the elements of magic in those scenes were very well done. I fell in love with this book and Libba Bray seems quite an interesting author (an interview with Ms. Bray is included in the book). There are loose ends that tell me there will be a second novel. I hope this turns into a series. It is too good for it to be a one-time story. I recommend *A Great and Terrible Beauty* most highly. This novel is one of the best reading investments I've made thus far this year!

"Wow!" was all I could say after reading this book. I was awed by the characters, the setting and the lyracisim of the story, which seemed so believable despite its fantastical plot. The book centers around Gemma Doyle, a 16-year-old British teen living in India during the late 1800's. Anxious to go live in London, Gemma is miserable in this foreign land, to say the least. When her mother dies mysteriously, Gemma is sent to an English boarding school, Spence, to finish her education. But trouble doesn't stop there. Gemma is haunted by mysterious visions, where she sees her mother, a young girl and a myserious beast. At the same time, she must attempt to assimilate into the elite Spence society. Later, Gemma uncovers the diary of Mary Dowd, which unleashes the story of the Order, an old Spence society, no longer existing, that was comprised of girls who traveled to other realms and the spirit world. In addition, the secrets of Mary's death, and her friend Sarah's, are

unraveled. When one of Gemma's new friends decides to reinstate the Order, Gemma and two others join her. But this coming-of-age heroine will quickly discover that all is not as it seems...and someone (something?) is after her. This is an incredible story. It is well-written and captivating. The characters, especially Gemma's friend Felicity, literally seem to step off the pages and enter our world. But what really sets this book apart from any others is the way that Libba Bray has woven a sharp analysis of Victorian society into a gripping fictional tale. *A Great and Terrible Beauty* is a must-read that will stick with young adult readers long after the last page has been turned.

What, in your opinion, is more important: What an author has to say or how an author chooses to say it? Take, for example, Libby Bray's, "*A Great and Terrible Beauty*". Set in a Victorian era girl's boarding school, the book has the uneasy task of having a great voice and yet not much in the way of a plot. Bray struggles to weave together the different components that made up (wealthy) women's lives in 19th century Britain. At times she is exceedingly gifted. At others, she falls short of the mark. Gemma Doyle was born and raised in India with her mother, father, and brother. Having just turned sixteen she is like any other adolescent girl, getting into squabbles with her mom and pouting that she cannot go to live in England. Deliverance for Gemma comes as a very mixed blessing when she witnesses her mother's suicide (in a vision, no less) and is sent to an all-girl's finishing school outside of London. Falling into the usual petty squabbles of popularity and independence, Gemma eventually comes to realize that there is more to the Spence Academy, and herself, than she could ever have known. In a madcap tale of gypsies, magical powers, and deep dark soul-sucking evil Gemma has to face up to her own personal demons as well as the very real spirits that wish her, and her friends, harm. On one level, this is just your typical romantic bodice-ripper complete with virile dangerous young men and the comedy of manners that set the standards so long ago. Reading this book really seemed to me to be a kind of "*The Craft*" meets "*The Little Princess*". Gemma befriends both popular and unpopular alike and much of the book dwells on the problems haunting each of her friends. While Bray has an excellent voice for dialogue and situational comedy, I couldn't quite figure out what she was trying to say with her characters. One minute the two popular girls, Pippa and Felicity, would be playing incredibly cruel tricks on their classmates. Next, Gemma is their best friend and they all bare their souls over cups of whiskey. While the story really does make you feel as if these girls are getting closer, I found it very weird that when some of the girls go over the edge and deal in dark magics and (in a sense) murder, Gemma is perfectly willing to forgive them three pages later and never mention it again. There is no blame in this novel, a thing I found peculiar (especially when you're dealing with sixteen year-olds). When

Gemma's friends get an innocent teacher fired, Gemma minds for maybe two hours and then, once more, forgets. Then there's the fact that we never meet the villain. This book might have just as well plastered the words, "SEQUEL COMING SOON" on its cover for all that it alludes to future books. It is very rare to read an entire book about a villain whose name appears from page seven onwards, and yet we never meet them even once. The resolutions in this book are shaky at best and though the bookflap for "A Great and Terrible Beauty" states this this is "the story of a girl who saw another way" out of the standard roles written for women, by the end Gemma really hasn't changed anything in the least. And finally there are the gypsies. Why is it that gypsies are always the standard ethnic group for magical doings? There are actual gypsies in the world, you know. This book, however, prefers the romantic version, choosing to forget that they are an actual culture with actual dealings in the world. Turning gypsies into the mythical magical people that exist only in the minds of over-romanticizing white people not only does real gypsies a disservice but it makes books like this one offensive. I won't even dwell on how Bray chose to display natives of India as well. Let's just say this book reads best if you like rooting for Anglo-Saxons. I'm being harsh on this book, and for good reason. Bray is capable of wonderful writing. The slow building threat of Gemma's situation, and the fact that she is repeatedly told to cease and desist all magic or pay the consequences, all this is very good and dark. Unfortunately, there's never a payoff at the end. The gypsy Kartik tells Gemma to stop or else, but he never makes good on his threat. Gemma never really pays for anything she's done either. I was so confused by what was good and bad in this story that I spent three quarters of the book believing that Gemma's mother, for all intents and purposes, was an illusion or an evil creature in disguise. That's just me, but in all other ways the book is very bad at rewarding the reader for slogging through the foreshadowing. And boy oh boy is there a LOT of foreshadowing. In any case, I think with a little rewriting this could have been an excellent novel. Unfortunately, we'll never know now. None of this is to say that "A Great and Terrible Beauty" isn't a great read. It really is exciting and interesting. I'm simply warning you that it is possible that you might feel a little let down or cheated at the end. The climaxes never climax as much as they could. The fearful moments are never quite fearful enough. It's a book of halves, never a whole. But for any reader who wants to dwell in the darkness a little and read a tale about a girl who has the capability of giving herself a great deal of power, go to it. It is, above all things, rather fun.

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