

Among the Ruins – Ausma Zehanat Khan – Minotaur (St. Martin's) \$25.99 HC – 9781250096739 2/14/17

This author was one of those who participated in the “Books & Brews” afternoon speed-dating session with about a hundred booksellers at last fall's MPIBA trade show. The event is always interesting and informative. She is new to me but I will look forward to more in time.

This is a first-rate mystery with a twist; it's set in Iran, mostly Teheran and Esfahan, but the protagonist occasionally goes further afield. Not knowing what you think Iran is like it's hard to say that you won't be surprised at the depictions of beautiful sites, landscapes and friendly people that emerges but I was. I found it refreshing. Our sleuth is Esa Khattak; he is a Canadian detective of Afghani heritage. He is on vacation after a harrowing case that rattled his nerves when he's approached by a mysterious woman who turns out to be an agent for the Canadian government, looking into the killing of an Iranian/Canadian citizen while attempting to obtain her daughter's release from a notoriously brutal prison. Khattak and his able assistant, Rachel Getty, still in Toronto, must tread carefully among the landmines of culture, language and politics that characterize this turbulent nation. They work from both ends of the telephone lines to manage it in an entertaining and enlightening way. I knew little about Iran before, and now I know a little more.

The narrative is brisk and while the names, organizations and history can be a little confusing, it all makes sense in the ways experienced mystery readers expect. Workmanlike and adept writing helps keep interest high. Altogether a good one.

Shelf Talker: Afghani/Canadian police detective Esa Khattak makes another appearance here in a mystery set in Teheran, Iran and Toronto, Canada. Brisk pace and lucid writing help the reader navigate the differences in culture that are a large part of the solution to the problem.