



## Even the Darkest Stars

*Heather Fawcett*

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Kamzin has always dreamed of becoming one of the Emperor's royal explorers, the elite climbers tasked with mapping the wintry, mountainous Empire and spying on its enemies. She knows she could be the best in the world, if only someone would give her a chance.

But everything changes when the mysterious and eccentric River Shara, the greatest explorer ever known, arrives in her village and demands to hire Kamzin—not her older sister Lusha, as everyone had expected—for his next expedition. This is Kamzin's chance to prove herself—even though River's mission to retrieve a rare talisman for the emperor means climbing Raksha, the tallest and deadliest mountain in the Aryas. Then Lusha sets off on her own mission to Raksha with a rival explorer who is determined to best River, and Kamzin must decide what's most important to her: protecting her sister from the countless perils of the climb or beating her to the summit.

The challenges of climbing Raksha are unlike anything Kamzin expected—or prepared for—with avalanches, ice chasms, ghosts, and even worse at every turn. And as dark secrets are revealed, Kamzin must unravel the truth of their mission and of her companions—while surviving the deadliest climb she has ever faced.

## Even the Darkest Stars Details

Date : Published September 5th 2017 by HarperCollins/Balzer + Bray


ISBN :

Author : Heather Fawcett

Format : Kindle Edition 437 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Young Adult, Young Adult Fantasy

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# From Reader Review Even the Darkest Stars for online ebook

## Scrill says

They climb a mountain.

**The Story-** I was really looking forward to this book. When I picked it up I said to myself, “*Mountains, Gandalf! Mountains!*” No joke, I like to quote LOTR aloud quite a bit. But you know what? That’s all that there really was to this book. Sure there was actual story going on in the background, but in the foreground? Climbing, hiking, snowing, falling, climbing, mountain village, mountain peak, valleys, forest, snow shoes, rope, rocks, etc. THEN at 90% the story changes, you get some answers from the questions that are just danced around through the beginning, and then it’s all “to be continued” in the next book. WHICH I REFUSE TO SUFFER THROUGH. I cannot believe I didn’t DNF this book. It was **literally** putting me to sleep every night. I would read two pages in bed and would doze off! If it was good, I would have had problems falling asleep because I would be so absorbed in the book. Frustratingly though, it wasn’t!

**The World Building-** I don’t mind the superficial magical world building that was involved in this book. But I do mind the fact that there were dragons in this book and they were basically just used as lamps. I’m not joking! I thought, ooooh dragons. But they weren’t anything but flying torches!

**The Characters-** I thought all the characters had really superficial personalities. Everyone had their skill and that was all that was pressed upon. Either they were a good or bad shaman, a good or bad climber, or were just there for filler.

**The Soundtrack-** Mew – Snow Brigade

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## Tink Magoo is bad at reviews says

3.5 stars

I know I carry on about the flow in stories a lot, but really it can make all the difference and pull a mediocre tale up at least a star and Heather Fawcett has a style that’s so easy to read that I found it hard to put this one down (even during the slower parts). Add to that the small mountainside setting and an adventurous trek surrounded by mysteries. I loved those aspects. The pacing was a bit off through the middle (slow) and end (rushed), but aside from that, I’m looking forward to some ass-kicking in the next book.

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## Lauren says

A solid 5 star read!

I didn't really know what to expect when I picked this up but it definitely wasn't what was contained within. Even the Darkest Stars is a fabulous, dark and snow-filled read with some great characters (Kamzin, River, Tem and Ragtooth, of course) and leaves you wanting more. The atmosphere is tense and eerie and the descriptions of the mountains were superb! I followed Kamzin every step of the way and I even figured out one of the characters from nearly halfway in (I knew there was something suspect about a certain character). I thoroughly enjoyed this and will definitely be purchasing the sequel; with an ending like that, it's impossible not to continue!

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## **Cait • A Page with a View says**

This was kind of like my experience with Three Dark Crowns where I loved the setting but wasn't sure how I felt about the actual story until the last 15% where I was screaming internally and NEED THE SEQUEL NOW. So. good.

Ok... I'm going to try to explain the awesomeness of this story without spoilers. Kamzin is training to be the shaman in a Himalayan village in a fictional kingdom, but she isn't as good at magic as her friend Tem. Kamzin would rather be an explorer like her mother, who died in an expedition that she and her sister Lusha survived.

One day the emperor's Royal Explorer shows up in the village and Lusha (who can read the stars) vanishes with one of his men. Kamzin then sets off as a guide to the Royal Explorer, a super cute nineteen year old guy named River Shara. Her friend Tem comes along because he's obviously interested in Kamzin aaaaand a love triangle ensues.

River explains to Kamzin that the emperor took the power of the witches and bound it, but the spell is weakening. He needs a powerful talisman that the witches left in their sky city on the top of Raksha, the world's tallest mountain. Nobody's ever climbed that mountain, but if the witches get their power back they could destroy everything. But Kamzin finds out there are two sides to every story... and that's all I shall say about that.

I like this story a lot more looking back on it now that I know where it's going. I did lose some interest in the middle while the characters and story wandered around a bit. And I'm not against love triangles as a rule - I just like it when they're not the main focus of the story.

BUT THE SETTING IS SO COMPLETELY GORGEOUS and magical and I just loved it.

A lot of things seem sketchy or barely touched on because the actual plot isn't revealed until 85%. It's waaaay more interesting once the whole story gets going at the end! The plot twist is kind of obvious, but that didn't hurt anything. It was just fun to see the story suddenly pick up and get AWESOME. (And the other parts of the story were never *boring*... I just wasn't sure how much I cared yet).

### Elements I loved

- SNOWY MOUNTAIN SETTING. I need more Himalayan stories, please.
- fire demons
- shapeshifting witches
- Kamzin's familiar is a wee mangy fox
- fiangul bird people (travelers lost in blizzards who were possessed by winged spirits & lure others to the

same fate)

- dragons!!!!

- solid writing

- I freaking love explorers.

- Kamzin makes a lot of tough calls and really directs the story through her choices instead of letting the story happen to her

So in the end I absolutely loved this world and am really excited to see what the sequel does now!!

Thank you to the publisher for sending me an ARC.

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## **Rachel E. Carter says**

Unexpectedly epic.

Honestly the blurb for this book never interested me but hearing reviewer friends liked this made me curious and put the book on my TBR months ago... I'M SO HAPPY I GAVE THIS BOOK A CHANCE!!! The setting was AMAZING (I have a thing for harsh landscape/survival-ish stories), the romance was worth it, and honestly I've never really read anything like this -I *so* appreciate the author's research into mountaineering (I felt like I was right there with Kamzin) and the setting was so creepy and harsh I loved it (like I said, I'm a serious survival story buff). I found parts of this book (the middle to the not-quite-end) a bit slow but really this book was perfect. And I love how it ended -so many questions for how things will be resolved (I won't drop any spoilers but yasssss, the love interest has another side, hehe!)...

The one thing I didn't like. And when I said I didn't like I mean I was ready to cry buckets because it was so terrible to read.... (view spoiler).

Another author to watch, guys, and give this book a chance -you won't regret it!!!

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## **Hollis says**

I'm tempted to award a whole extra star for the sole fact that this isn't a trilogy and everything will be resolved in the next book. Buuuut.

Okay, real talk. The setting in *EVEN THE DARKEST STARS* is so cool (see what I did there, ps it's about climbing a giant freezing cold snowy ass mountain, incase you didn't know..), I'm pretty sure it's based off the Himalayas, and it's so vivid and breathtaking. Which is the upside to a book set around a journey-style adventure. Bad news? It's an entire book set around a journey-style adventure. Which means there's a lot of not much happening because they are camping or climbing or cold or hurt.

That being said, I (mostly) really liked our leading lady. She's probably supposed to be a special snowflake but isn't because she can't do magic, thereby overruling her father's desire for her to be the village shaman in training, she isn't pretty, she's the youngest daughter, and she and her bestie have already tried dating and failed at it. So even the love triangle.. isn't, really, though I suppose you could argue the fact. What she **is** good at, however, is climbing. She wants to leave her small town and explore. So when the Royal Explorer,

basically the second most powerful person in the kingdom after the Emperor, comes into town, she wants to impress him and help him on his mission to save the kingdom.

*"I'd like you to speak to the herdsman about hiring another yak. I don't like the looks of the one your father offered. The way it stares at me, it's as if it's plotting something. I don't travel with plotters. Thieves, liars, cheats, that's all right, but I can't stand plotters."*

Other than our heroine, there were moments I'd find I really liked River, the aforementioned Royal Explorer. Some of the banter between them was cute. A little YA-y modern but hey, whatever. I'm not sure how I felt about Tem, the best friend and ex, but I liked the strength of their friendship and how that was more heavily emphasized than any jealousies. He also played a very important role in the journey other than 'I'm here because you need protecting/because I love you still/because other guy is cuter than me and I'm threatened' which was a nice surprise. As for the rest of the secondary characters, however, most felt me unmoved. Which is part of my problem with this story on a whole. I liked so much of it but didn't really feel anything? Maybe just because so little happened.

*"What is he?"*

**"What do you think he is? A fox."**

*"Are you sure? Looks more like a hairball with teeth."*

**"He has some mange. There's no need to be rude about it."**

There's magic, mystery, witches and wintry elements. The pacing was pretty consistent, which is to say a bit slow as they journey forwards both literally and, for some characters, emotionally, but the ending left us with one or two major surprises that guarantee I'll be back for more. I'm hoping for a lot more action in the final installment, though, specifically with the witches that were more of a threat than actually present in book one -- which, considering the ending, seems like a natural next step.

2.75 "I wanted to push against the world and feel it push back" stars

**\*\* I received an ARC from Edelweiss and the publisher (thank you!) in exchange for an honest review. \*\***

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## **Emma says**

DNF @ 74%.

Hmm. Hmmmmm. I'm feeling very conflicted about this book. It had a really promising start, and the worldbuilding was consistently FANTASTIC. The descriptions of the rugged terrain of the mountain range, the snow and ice and glaciers, the sense of mysticism and legend, the **PET DRAGONS**.....it felt like the kind of story told around a campfire on a chilly night, full of so much adventure and potential that you can feel it crackling in the cool air. Unfortunately.....none of the atmosphere and gorgeous settings were enough for me to push past the flat characters.

Kamzin, our main character, is the younger daughter of the chief in her small, mountainous village. For as long as she can remember, she's wanted nothing more than the chance to serve as one of the emperor's elite explorers, traveling to foreign lands to chart the furthest reaches of the empire.

Kamzin is a strong and capable climber and navigator. Sadly, **she suffers from traces of the all-too-common “I’m not like other girls” syndrome.** She thinks she’s superior because she doesn’t care about her clothes, doesn’t have perfect manners, and has Big Dreams of leaving behind her small provincial town. She looks down on the pretty girls who dance and flirt with boys (especially the very tall and handsome and douchey River Shara, who by the way she definitely does not have a crush on ~~wait what who said that?~~). Oh, and she’s kind of an asshole to Tem (her best friend) too. He very clearly has feelings for her, and she kind of walks all over him in her efforts to impress River.

She’s just.....*very meh*. Tem and River were equally meh for me, and none of the supporting characters were very interesting either. The love triangle was also a tired cliché (mysterious/famous/bad boy newcomer vs. sweet/supportive/boring best friend), and I didn’t care about the characters enough to be invested in it at all.

It’s mainly a credit to Fawcett’s stellar worldbuilding that I made it through the first three quarters of this book. I hoping it would get better, that I would see more development, grow attached to the characters.....nope!! If I had more time this week, I might have finished it, but it was feeling like such a chore that I finally decided not to continue.

It also feels very long. The plot—or at least the first 75+ percent of it—consists of a very lengthy and tedious journey through an icy mountain range. There’s a lot of conversation and mountain climbing and not much else, so if that sounds interesting to you, you might enjoy this more. There were some interesting parts, and the descriptions of the landscape were truly beautiful, but it seemed to drag on for much longer than it should have.

**I received an ARC from the publisher via Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review.**

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## **Laura says**

This sounded so different from your standard YA fantasy novel with the mountainous Himalayan setting being the most standout aspect. I was excited for the Royal Explorer to come in and pit sister against sister. Unfortunately, other than the setting, everything else was entirely forgettable. If I hadn't read this as quickly as I did, if only to get past the slow pace, I would've forgotten details needed to go on. Now after sitting on the story for a week before reviewing, I can remember the big things that happen. But I'm wondering...what happened in between? The problem is I know that nothing happened. It just was so boring and slow until the big twist happens, which is actually quite predictable.

The majority of the book is characters on a journey up the mountain with one sister traveling with the royal explorer and crew. The other sister is on her own mission up the mountain. It's a race up the trek, but Kamzin also feels the need to protect her sister.

Oh, and you can't forget the magic. There is a magical system and Kamzin is training to be a shaman. Meanwhile, her bff Tem shows a great affinity for magic. And her sister Lusha is really into astrology and reading the future in the stars. I wish this magical system was better explored.

It is unfortunate that the sister relationship wasn't used to the book's benefit. The story follows Kamzin, and leaves us not caring about Lusha at all. Lusha does a lot of off-putting things that made me wonder if she

really even cared about Kamzin in the same way Kamzin did about her. It just felt like a bossy older sister who thinks she knows best, but didn't feel real beyond that.

This feels like a bit of a wasted concept. It could've been done so much better.

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## Acqua says

**I've never read anything quite like this.**

4.25 stars.

YA fantasy is my most-read genre, but *Even the Darkest Stars* surprised me. It's not about saving the world or defeating an evil ruler or winning some magical competition. It's about climbing a mountain no one has ever climbed (and survived) before, and it's set in a fantasy empire inspired by the Himalayas.

**The setting felt magical, and it had a rich, detailed mythology.** The people of Azmiri have familiars, magical talismans, and use small dragons to light the rooms. There are witches, fianguls, and demons who will strike dangerous bargains with you, feeding on your soul.

If you don't like to read about long journeys, this is probably not the book for you. If you, like me, love description of cold, forbidding landscapes, and love to read about climbing, try *Even the Darkest Stars*. **It's also the perfect winter book.**

I loved Kamzin a lot. Her curiosity, her love for the mountains - she didn't feel like a typical YA character. She's not good at magic or fighting, she's good at surviving and climbing.

Some reviews say she has not-like-other-girls syndrome and... I don't agree. Being a bit boy-crazy (and I've read far worse than this), not being feminine and having a difficult relationship with your sister doesn't mean feeling superior to other girls! **Can we stop hating on female characters for no reason?**

I didn't like the male characters as much. Tem is the typical YA best friend who is in love with the main character and tries to hold her back, and River is the bad boy. Yes, there's a love triangle, kind of, but the main character states she's not into one of them anymore, so... not really?

River was condescending and irritating for most of the book. Those are qualities I hate in love interests, and for part of the book I hated him.

And then I had a theory. A theory that made me stop hate him.

I won't spoil anything, but I will tell you this: **to make me like an unlikable character**, you don't need a tragic past, an excuse or a description of nice abs - **you need the right framing. It's always all about the framing.**

**I'm not even mad that I guessed all the plot twists.** That was the way I wanted the story to go, and I'm glad it did.

And that ending. I mean, I saw it coming, but actually reading it...

Now I'm worried for the sequel. I don't want the love triangle to reopen, or the book to take a black-and-white approach to the conflict. **But this ending has so much potential and I can't wait for the next book.**



Trigger warning: death of a pet.

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## Emily May says

*"I never thought someone like you could exist." He watched me with a half smile on his face.  
"A girl from a tiny village many explorers have never even heard of, with greater skill than most of them will ever possess."*

Super special heroine... ✓

Love triangle... ✓

Hot dude #1 is lifelong best friend... ✓

Hot dude #2 is an obnoxious newcomer... ✓

Virtually nothing happens for 75% of the book... ✓

The only reason I am not giving this one star is because **the setting is so excellent**. The author's world-building is undeniably strong and I have never read about a fantasy version of the Himalayas with a culture based on that of Nepalese people. I want to rate it higher based on that premise alone.

Unfortunately, though, nothing else impressed me. The characters were **stock and forgettable**, and I seem to often have a problem with journey books when the plot in its entirety consists of a bunch of people moving from one location to another. It is especially dull in cases like this when the narrator (and, therefore, the reader) is not told why they are going or what they are looking for. It leaves me asking the question: why should I care?

The strong sense of place cannot hold this book up on its own. It's a painfully-boring slow trek through the Himalayan wilderness as Kamzin develops feelings for the mysterious River Shara, whilst also trying not to hurt her best friend and ex - Tem. All we know is that River has been sent on an expedition by the Emperor to find something and he needs Kamzin to lead him there. By "there", I mean through the perilous Mount Raksha.

**There's too much conversation and journeying and not enough action.** If you are a huge fan of mountaineering and think a mountain expedition sounds like an exciting story, then you might have more luck with this. But without more exciting characters, or just some tension or drama in general, I found it very hard to persevere. There was once in the whole book when my interest stirred - I made a note of it! - and that was at 75%, and it unfortunately didn't mark a turning point. The brief excitement quickly died down again.

I thought there was a lot of missed potential, to be honest. In the early chapters, we hear about witches and mountain spirits - I was really intrigued by the bird-human monsters - but for the vast majority of the book, these are just stories and very little is done with them. The witches, especially, are notably absent (view spoiler), though theories about them pop up in many conversations.

Ultimately, I just think neither the story nor the characters are particularly interesting. I applaud the author for heading into new territory, but this journey did nothing for me.

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### **Ben Alderson says**

That ending really saved this from being a THREE STAR.

I mean hello BIG TWIST.

I MEAN helllooooooooooooooooo

I am going to need book two.. right NOW ahh!

I can't wait

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### **Melissa ♥ Dog/Wolf Lover ♥ Martin says**

Different and good!!

Mel ?

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### **ellie ? says**

i'm kinda torn about how to rate this. on one hand, it was more of a 3.5 star, but on the other, it was almost a 4.5, so i think i'm just going to stick with 4 stars.

i had absolutely no idea what this book was about when i picked it up, but i had heard that it had dragons in it so i was super excited. however, the dragons in this book are only used as floating lamps, basically. that was disappointing, but that was also mainly my fault for not reading the synopsis to figure out what the book was about exactly.

instead of dragons, this book follows kamzin, a girl who loves to explore. because of this, she's dreamed of becoming one of the royal explorers. one day, river shara, the most well known royal explorer, shows up in her small town and takes her on a dangerous mountain climbing adventure.

the plot was quite interesting! i've never read another book like it, tbh, so that was nice. i loved seeing kamzin's interest in climbing and hiking, and she was a very sassy and smart main character. however, i did personally feel like the middle of the book was dragged out a bit too much, and found myself skimming through the pages here and there.

despite that, i did really enjoy the book, and with that plot twist at the end ((which i really was not expecting)) i plan on picking up the sequel!!

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### **Inge says**

**3.5 stars**

Gosh, *Even the Darkest Stars* was absolutely beautiful. The setting especially - most of this book takes place in the mountains, because our characters are trying to find an ancient talisman at the top of Mount Raksha. Incidentally, this book could really do with a map, but the world-building itself was very nicely done. We're talking about an age-old feud between humankind and witches, pet dragons, familiars, pet dragons, shamanism, PET DRAGONS. All of it pampered around this beautiful scenery of snow-covered mountains and star-filled skies. I was mesmerised.

The story itself was also really good, though a bit slow. Even though Goodreads says my Kindle edition was 304 pages, it *felt* a lot longer. While I had a really good time reading this book, things get a bit monotonous when the characters are constantly walking and trekking, walking and trekking, doing some climbing, more trekking... Even this glorious mountainous setting get old after a while. Therefore, *Even the Darkest Stars* felt like it was 100 pages longer at times. It especially dragged around the 60-70% mark, when I wondered how we *still* weren't at the ending, and read paragraphs three times without taking anything in.

The ending, though, made up for a lot of that slowness. It definitely sets things up beautifully for the sequel, which I am very much interested in. Sounds like we'll be in for a good ride.

*Thank you to Edelweiss and the publisher for providing me with a copy*

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## **Eilonwy says**

Kamzin, second daughter of her village-Elder father, is apprenticed to the local shaman. But Kamzin stinks at magic. What she really wants is to follow in the footsteps of her mother, an explorer. When River Shara, the Emperor's official explorer, arrives in her village on his way to Raksha, the tallest mountain in the Aryas range, where a talisman that will protect the nation from witches is said to be hidden, Kamzin seizes her chance. But working for River means working against her older sister, Lusha, and risking the life of her best friend, Tem. It also means coming face to face with the monsters that roam the Aryas ... and the darkness that can be found in human hearts, including Kamzin's own.

I really enjoyed this!

The setting was awesome, in a Himalayas-like mountain chain. Everyone has to have some proficiency at climbing and navigating ledges and boulders, but Kamzin really loves testing herself on the trickiest terrain she can find. She enjoys nothing more than finding a way up or down a seemingly impossible cliff face. This came across less as braggadocio, and more as a deep love of place and the challenges offered by that place.

The characters are excellent, too. Kamzin felt completely believable to me as a 17-year-old. The other characters were all well-developed, with their own motives and agendas driving them, which maintained tension throughout the story. There's some mild romantic tension between Kamzin and River, and Kamzin and Tem, but it's not a ridiculous love triangle: it's more that Kamzin sees that she has multiple possibilities. But she doesn't need to choose immediately, and everyone is mostly focused on the mission.

Their goal requires focus, because much of it is taking place across unfamiliar, barely-charted terrain. In addition to the cold, bad weather, and the difficulty of traversing glaciers and icefall as they head upward, the land is populated by supernatural creatures: witches, ghosts, and *fiangul*, vicious bird-headed beings. Magic can help, a little. But a person really needs to keep her head, and not allow herself to be distracted.

I loved the mythology in this book. The witches are mostly off-page, but their menace hangs over the story. I liked the magic: everyone has some mild talent for it, and some people are naturally much better at it than others, but it takes a toll in both physical and mental energy on everyone who uses it.

The pacing was breathless, with no good place to stop reading, as action and surprises fill every page. The action and plot twists were balanced by Kamzin's growing experience and character development. The plot threads all led somewhere and tied together. Information provided at the beginning of the story turned out to be important at the end.

This was one of my favorite reads so far this year! I'm so happy when a YA fantasy is so well-written and plotted. I'm really looking forward to spending more time with Kamzin in Book 2, which I think will tie up the plot (this looks to be a duology rather than a trilogy). But it doesn't come out until December! Argh. This didn't exactly end on a cliffhanger, but it sure wants to be continued.

I'm not sure if I recommend reading this book now, or waiting until both are out so you can just read them together.

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