



An Infidel in Paradise

S.J. Laidlaw

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Set in Pakistan, this is the story of a teen girl living with her mother and siblings in a diplomatic compound. As if getting used to another new country and set of customs and friends isn't enough, she must cope with an increasingly tense political situation that becomes dangerous with alarming speed. Her life and those of her sister and brother depend on her resourcefulness and the unexpected help of an enigmatic Muslim classmate.

An Infidel in Paradise Details

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From Reader Review An Infidel in Paradise for online ebook

Lisbeth Avery {Domus Libri} says

Where do I start? AN INFIDEL IN PARADISE is about a girl who has moved to Pakistan and has to adjust to living there which basically means it's a high school drama set in well, Pakistan. That's really at AN INFIDEL IN PARADISE was - a high school drama. The plot promises a YA political thriller. I mean, it actually says this in the plot summary:

an increasingly tense political situation that becomes dangerous with alarming speed

But then again it says this in the plot summary...

an enigmatic Muslim classmate

And everyone knows when a plot has the word "enigmatic" in it, it's usually about a romance not what it actually promises. In fact, I don't think I've read *one* books with the word "enigmatic" in the plot summary that didn't have romance as the main focus... (seriously guys, if you can find one non-romance focused book with the word "enigmatic" in the summary, I'll send you some chocolate).

My biggest overall complaint is the simple fact that AN INFIDEL IN PARADISE glorified cheating. I don't think this is the intent since (view spoiler) but even so, it was there.

The love interest, Mustapha, is engaged to Aisha. Emma comes in and starts flirting with Mustapha, trying to get him to leave Aisha (who he admitted to loving). That's what the main story is about. Aisha is portrayed as the jealous bitch even though she's just trying to get Emma to stop. Emma even acknowledges that she is flirting with Mustapha but she continues throughout the book.

Cheating is *not* okay. I don't give a damn if it's because you love her (you don't). Cheating will never be ok. Mustapha is also to blame since he seems to want the best of both worlds, both Aisha and Emma.

Characters

The main character in the novel is where many of my complaints center since she's so infuriating. I really wanted to strangle her around twenty times, which isn't really that much but I restrained myself - a lot. Emma hates every person with boobs really.

If the girl looks at her the wrong way, she giving her death glares. If a girl dresses a certain way, she has to be an idiot. There's one character where Emma takes one look at her and nicknames her Hip-Hop Barbie. The little adjectives here and there make it very obvious that she thinks that everyone is an idiot to her genius.

Emma seems to think that the world revolves around her. Everyone in her family is mad? Obviously, the only reason they could be annoyed is because of *her*. I mean, it couldn't be any other reason!

The other characters were stereotypes. There was the ice queen bitch who hates the main character, the amazing handsome wonderful love interest, the idiot friends who don't know as much as the amazing wonderful main character, the angsty little brother who hates the main character, the understanding teacher, the parent who is like totes annoying and doesn't understand our main character ... I could go on and on.

The only character I'll go over is Aisha, or better known as ice queen (she was seriously called Ice Queen). Aisha was that bitch who takes one look at Emma and WAAHH I HATES YOU AND I WILL MAKE YOUR LIFE MISERABLE 4EVER. Except, in this one, I totally agree with that sentiment. Sure, it was weird that she immediately hated Emma but the first time she met Emma, Emma flirted with her fiancé and disrespected Aisha's country. I would hate her too ~~,oh wait I do.~~

Plot and Writing

Plot

As I said, the plot is very disappointing. The only "political tension" in the book is at say 75% and it's only mentioned a bit before forgotten in favour of the romance. The "political tension" comes back at the very end in an odd and sudden terrorist attack but that's it.

The summary says that *...her life and those of her sister and brother depend on her resourcefulness and the unexpected help of an enigmatic Muslim classmate.* but honestly Emma's life is *not* in danger and Mustapha isn't really doing any helping.

The plot summary is a LIAR.

Writing

The one positive thing in this book is the writing. Though, childish and mediocre at times (~~well most of the time but who's counting right?~~), some of the descriptions for the places were truly amazing. I felt like I was right there with Emma at times. That was awesome.

Likes and Dislikes

Likes:

- Writing

Dislikes:

- Everything else

In conclusion

I really hated AN INFIDEL IN PARADISE and wouldn't recommend it to anyone.

Find this review and more at my blog:

a_tiffyfit says

Imagine what it would be like to be yanked away from all the things that you are familiar with and

comfortable with, and having to start fresh at a new place. This is bad enough as a teen moving from one town to another. Now picture all that and instead of a new town, you are in a foreign country where you don't speak the language, you aren't familiar with the culture, and its natives hate you purely because you are a westerner: white, blonde, and blue-eyed. This is what Emma facing and she's not happy about it either.

With a mom who is a workaholic and a dad who is living back from where Emma is from with the young ex-maid of theirs, Emma feels lost, unloved, resentful, and angry. At the new international school, Emma befriends an American girl, Angie, who helps lighten the angst a little only to lose her quickly adding anew to the bitterness and anger towards everything, but mostly towards her parents for messing up her life.

To add another straw to the camel's back, the boy Emma falls for (and he with her) is one she cannot have, they cannot be together. The racial and cultural and religious differences simply will not let that happen. Poor Emma is feeling sorry for herself with all of this, but the saving grace comes from the most unlikely source, her "enemy" aka "The Ice Princess", the boy's girlfriend and fiancée. What? Fiance? Girlfriend? Yeah. Arranged marriage. There is nothing that can be done; it is an arranged marriage by both sets of parents and its part of that culture.

However, through that 'saving grace' in the form of charitable work, Emma finds focus and meaning in the sea of mess and misery. In the midst, she not only finds solace but comes to understand a great many things, albeit unintentionally. She learns that people are the same deep down, no matter the external factors. Within the heart, we all strive for the same things: peace, happiness, family, love. Although unintended, Emma inadvertently matures, even when surrounded by what she'd see as interminable problems and being in hell.

It is through the near death experience that she comes fully to understand and appreciate the important fact that above all else in the world, without your family, everything in the world is meaningless. It is the family that makes up who you are and what you are. When faced with the utmost, gravest danger, Emma fully connects with this fact and no matter what is going on in the world and in the family, they love you for who you are and always will. They need you just as much as you need them.

Plenty of lessons learned in this book and a very good read.

Moze (SmartFolksRead) says

When Emma's parents split up she is left reeling especially because her mother has decided to pack her and her siblings up and relocate to Pakistan from Puerto Rico. This isn't Emma's first move, though. As the daughter of an employee of the Canadian Embassy, Emma has lived all over the world, but this time around she is having a hard time adjusting to the culture. Emma finds herself experiencing things she never thought she would: from riots in the streets that result in the students at her school being unable to leave the building for fear of their safety to realizing that not all people are free to do as they please.

I genuinely enjoyed this book. I picked it up one night when I was unable to sleep thinking I would just read a bit of it to help tire me out. Come 3 a.m. I was still sitting there reading needing to know what would happen to the characters that I had grown to like. Emma is your normal teenager who has trouble making friends when she moves and dealing with her emotions concerning her parents' divorce. I liked the fact that this novel was set in such an exotic location, but that Emma didn't see it that way at first, which is understandable considering her emotional state.

SPOILERS: I thought it was a bold choice to not have Mustafa and Emma end up together. To have Mustafa and Emma both acknowledge their feelings, but to know that it was impossible for them to be together because of Mustafa's engagement. The fact that Mustafa was in love with Emma and still told her that in the end he would have to pick the girl he had been promised to was something unexpected simply because in most YA the formula is to have the girl meet the boy, go through some trials, and in the end come out in a relationship or in a position to be in a relationship.

UNSPOILERS: Overall I greatly enjoyed this book and would recommend it to anyone who likes books set in other countries or that address Americans dealing with other cultures.

Lissa says

It was refreshing to read a young adult novel that was not a paranormal or dystopic romantic triangle (although I do love those). Emma is a sixteen year old daughter of a Canadian foreign consul. She has traveled all over the world but her own world is turned upside down with her parents separation. She is also dealing with yet another move, this time to Pakistan, in which she makes enemies on her very first day. I liked this book, and as I said before, it was refreshing. I don't know enough about Pakistan culture or diplomatic life but it seemed realistic enough. Emma made some huge mistakes that were somewhat frustrating at times, but she did evolve and learned her lesson in the end which I guess is all you can ask from a sixteen year old character.

Britta says

An Infidel in Paradise is the first book I've read that takes place in Pakistan, or even the first that takes places in that section of the Middle East. Whereas I haven't experienced that section of the planet in person or through books, I, like many people, have a distinct (but not necessarily accurate) picture of Pakistan. When I hear the name, I think of a dry, barren place filled with violence. I realize it is unfair to take a country I know virtually nothing about and apply such a negative label to it, but it is a product of media. The main character, Emma, feels the same way. Which is why she is less than excited to have just moved to Pakistan with her mother and two siblings.

Emma's mother works for the Canadian embassy, which is why the family moves around to strange, unique, and dangerous places. Each time Emma moves, she cuts connections with her past life - past friends - afraid that if she gets attached to the long distance friendships, the inevitable let down will be much more poignant. The story opens and immediately paints a negative image of Emma: she is pessimistic, moody, insecure, and rude. She is afraid to let people in and automatically thinks the worst of every situation. Granted, her acts are justifiable due to her new situation, but it doesn't change the fact that she is not ideal. However, this is not the case throughout the novel. A real strength of the novel is that there is a very clear and strong progression in Emma from beginning to end, pessimistic to optimistic, ignorant to understanding. Emma went into her new home with the same type of impression many of us hold; a terrorist ridden, barren country where she will forever be a target. However, by the end of the novel, she really gets a feel for the country and it changes her.

Although I cannot claim this novel to be realistic, since I have no idea what the situation is actually like in Pakistan, the story does feel very real. I mentioned that Emma starts to appreciate the country, and that is true, but just like the good aspects are highlighted, so are the bad. There are moments of action that made my

heart race, especially the last couple of chapters. There is a constant presence of danger that looms in the background of each scene. Emma and her family live in the Canadian compound which is surrounded by all the other western embassies, but she is not isolated from the country natives. When ever she can be seen by the public, her skin color and lack of extreme modesty make her a target. Some scenes are brutal and terrifying, but then some scenes are sweet and enlightening. The contrast between these two aspects really makes *An Infidel in Paradise* an interesting read.

Overall, I really enjoyed this novel. It provided me with a means to spend time in a place that I know nothing about, and in which not many YA novels take place (can you even think of another one? And not post-apocalyptic). As quick note on the actual book, I loved the designs at the beginning of the chapter, as well as the snake image (cobra?) that opens the novel. I really appreciate it when a publisher spends as much time on the inside of the book as it does on the cover. The designs are very similar to those featured on the cover, and the incorporation throughout was nice.

Tiffin29 says

Infidel in Paradise is young adult fiction at its finest. The plotting is fast-paced and compelling. The main protagonist, Emma, possesses a nuanced authenticity that is engaging and credible. Within minutes of beginning this book, the reader is plunged into Emma's inner world and vicariously experiencing all the tumultuous emotions of a young girl coming to grips with daily life in an utterly alien society.

And what a world it is! Pakistan is depicted with an immediacy that is palpable. The reader is presented with a culture of stark contrasts - the great wealth of the upper elite juxtaposed against the abject poverty of kids who survive by trash picking: the frenzied hatred of jihadists set against the benign serenity of an Islamic gardener.

Infidel in Paradise is a 'must-read' for all young adult readers with the intellectual curiosity to travel far! outside familiar comfort zones to an unforgettable terrain that will resonate long after the last page is turned.

The Twins Read says

This review can originally be found at [The Twins Read](#) .

Emma's life is in upheaval; after her father left them to live in Boracay with their maid, her mother uproots them from their cushy life in Manila and transplants them to Pakistan for a chance to start over. It's not easy for Emma to get used to her new surroundings; she has to deal with her parents' separation, the growing distance between her siblings and herself, and being the new girl in school.

Emma is your typical teenage girl. She's suffering from teenage angst, loneliness and the pressure of being a foreigner in a hostile country - she just feels so out of place. She misses her friends and her life back in Manila, and severs all contact with them. She's afraid to make new ones because she has this mindset that given her mother's occupation, there is no telling when and where they'll be the next day. We know how hard it is to have undergone something truly life-changing, only to be overwhelmed by a new environment; it's not pretty. But then Emma meets Mustapha, this handsome, charismatic boy whom she at first, got on the wrong foot with by blurting out racist comments about Pakistan. It doesn't take long, however, for Emma and

Mustapha to patch up and end up liking each other. However, add to the fact that Emma and Mustapha share kisses and longing looks, Mustapha is betrothed to another - Aisha. She is initially snarky, snobbish, and basically a spoiled brat all around, but when Emma gets to know a different side of her, exudes generosity, and kindness. The secondary characters - a mix of local and foreign folk - provide us with interesting cultural differences and shows us how something as simple as a kiss is treated in societal norms. We enjoyed the multi-cultural setting and it was interesting seeing things from Emma's point of view. Seeing Emma learn to accept her circumstances and be swept away by the magic of the culture was truly endearing.

Another thing we personally enjoyed was Emma's viewpoint of Manila. Not a lot of books - especially young adult ones - feature Manila as a backdrop, so we have no idea how foreigners truly view Manila. Besides from being the place where her family was last complete, Emma sounds like she's actually very enamored with the city. Her perception of Manila is so different from our perception of our own city that at times, it doesn't seem to be the same Manila at all - and we like it. It's nice to know that both the author and Emma seem to transcend beyond the usual perception of Manila. It reminded us that Manila isn't just a violent city filled with drug lords and gang members, but an actual, breathing city that is capable of loving its own citizens.

Our only issue with this one was that what transgressed between Emma and Mustapha seemed to be insta-love. After exchanging a lot of heated looks, short conversations, and a kiss or two, Emma's worries about marriage, and Mustapha's declaration of the three words only seemed to confirm our suspicions. It would have been nicer if their relationship was fully fleshed out. But then, these are teenagers, and while we aren't saying that teenagers aren't capable of being truly in love, we just think that this is the time where a lot of adolescents are confused about their feelings as well. So while the author may have delved into what teenagers perceive as love, Laidlaw also somehow reminds us that not every relationship will work out, despite the chemistry and (dare we say it?) love.

The climax left us feeling a little short-changed, the pace towards the end a bit hurried, and the ending a bit abrupt. But despite its shortcomings, *An Infidel in Paradise* may charm you with its delightful cultural nuances.

Jessica says

I really enjoyed reading this book! I found the characters to be very engaging and the story to be a page turner. Emma, the main character, has a lot of depth to her and it was very enjoyable to see how she and her various relationships (i.e., with her sister, mother, brother) developed over the course of the book. I found the setting of the book very compelling. It was also interesting to see what it is like for children and teens who move around a lot.

Susan says

Description: Sixteen-year-old Emma is no stranger to moving. The daughter of a Canadian diplomat, her life has been a series of changing landscapes, cultures and friendships. But when her parents split up and she and her siblings are forced to move to Pakistan with her mother, her feelings of loss and culture shock are overwhelming. Add to that rising political tensions and her attraction to a local boy who has been promised to someone else, Emma's life very quickly spirals out of control, putting herself and those she loves in

mortal danger. [From the publisher]

Review: Ages 12 and up. I've always enjoyed books set in a place I'm unlikely to visit—a pseudo-vacation, in a way. So I chose *An Infidel in Paradise* because it takes place in Pakistan, where Emma, the main character, has just moved. Emma's mother is a busy and often disengaged diplomat, and her parents have recently separated, with her beloved father remaining in the Philippines at their family's last post. Emma has lived all over the world, but she's shattered by the changes in her family and the adjustments of living in a restrictive and sometimes hostile country.

The book's not complicated, but it's rich in details and brings to life the stark differences between the cultures (Emma is Canadian) in a way that will be appealing to teens because it sneaks under the radar. You'll learn what traditional Pakistanis wear, but because the girls go shopping; you'll learn about arranged marriages, but through the eyes of the "hot" love interest. Laidlaw does a thorough job of introducing characters with different perspectives, from the wealthy Pakistani students who attend Emma's school, to the poor children who collect trash outside the diplomatic compound and the servants who look after Emma's family.

As a parent, this book reminded me of how unsettling and lonely the teen years can be, no matter where in the world you are. My heart ached for Emma for most of the book—as she gets angry and says something she later regrets, as she pushes her friends away so she doesn't have to risk losing them, as she misses her father but refuses to forgive him. She makes reckless but human decisions, but she loves and is loved genuinely, and the book comes full circle at the end as she regains her footing.

Middle-grade readers will like the casual language of the book, the teen-appropriate connection between Emma and Musa, and its quick pace. Adults will enjoy recommending it because of the cultural references and current events focus. A final note: the ending, though a bit dramatic for adults, is perfect for this genre.

Kim says

I received this ARC from Netgalley.

The idea of this story intrigued me from the beginning. I love that it is about a Canadian girl who's mother is an ambassador and that they're stationed in Pakistan. The story itself was a good read and an interesting look into what that type of life is for young adults. I wish it described Pakistan itself a little better, but given the climate of the book, it really couldn't be done. All in all, a satisfying story, but I could do without the romance aspect.

Brianna says

A well-written book with an extremely unlikeable character. A captivating setting and premise was tarnished by a selfish protagonist.

Full review forthcoming on www.slatebreakers.com.

Julia says

i loved it i was intereaged the whole way through , and the ending is good just not what your expecting

Jenni Enzor says

This was a fast read, but it was because I was so invested in the character. Emma is difficult to like, but her humor and her way of seeing the world really endeared her to me. Her observations were often bluntly honest, but that was so refreshing and believable. Having lived abroad (although not in Pakistan), I could relate to her feelings of not fitting in anywhere. I liked the ending, and thought Laidlaw made a great choice in how she resolved the main question of the plot. I would recommend this to others--especially for teens to see what life is like in other countries or for teens who've lived abroad themselves.

Sally says

So, Emma and her family (minus Dad, who left them for their maid in Manila) have just moved into the Canadian embassy enclave in Islamabad, Pakistan and what follows is a pretty fascinating culture-clash story as she adjusts to life in yet another new country, and finally comes to terms a little with all that moving around she's done. It's a tough life having to completely pick up and start fresh every few years, leaving behind old friends and having to make new ones that you'll just leave again... so what's the point? (view spoiler)

It's an interesting look at life in Pakistan for teenagers from a Western point of view as well. The trip to the market where first the girls (and soon boys too) turn Emma's and then her brother's wardrobes inside out looking for something suitable for her to wear, and THEN debate whether or not to leave her in the car until they can buy her a shawl to cover her head with, is brilliant.

(view spoiler)

The rioting scene near the end was bloody terrifying as well. The earlier one, when they were all holed up in the school, was chilling for how boring and usual it all was to so many of the students. (view spoiler)

I really enjoyed and was fascinated by this story, and it's also a very quick read which I always love. However, it loses a star for one of the most sickening instances of animal cruelty that I have ever read.

Helen says

Originally posted on [http://canlitforlittlecanadians.blogspot...](http://canlitforlittlecanadians.blogspot.com)

in·fi·del

noun \ˈin-f?-d?l, -f?-?del\

1 : one who is not a Christian or who opposes Christianity

2 a : an unbeliever with respect to a particular religion b : one who acknowledges no religious belief

3 : a disbeliever in something specified or understood

Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictio...> on May 8, 2013

Under this definition of infidel, just about anyone could be called an infidel. Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, atheists, agnostics - all could be considered infidels by another group. Yet the scathing judgement that is leveled against sixteen-year-old Emma as a Canadian teen forced to live in Islamabad, Pakistan is especially outrageous; she doesn't want to be there anymore than anyone else wants her there.

After her dad takes off with the family maid from their posting in Manila, Emma Grey's family (older brother Vince, younger sister Mandy and Mom) relocate to Pakistan for her mother's job, running the consular section of the Canadian embassy. Though embassy children are used to moving around a lot, the whole "make-new-friends and learn-to-fit-in" process required to make lifetolerable seems more problematic for Emma this time, probably because of her father's absence and mother's absorption in her work and obliviousness to her children's needs. Emma is resentful of her mother for forcing them to move (this was a weak effort to make Dad choose between his family and new partner), and for expecting more of Emma specifically, including mothering eight-year-old Mandy. Not surprising that Emma is brutally honest when asked by a new classmate, Mustapha Khan, how she is enjoying Pakistan.

"Well," I begin, feeling the familiar anger wakening like a beast inside me, "there's not a single mall, movie theater, or Caramel Frappuccino within a thousand miles, but there are huge poisonous reptiles, beggars on every street corner and all the atmosphere of a maximum-security penitentiary. I'm just surprised there's not more tourism." (pg. 21-22)

Ouch. Not the way to make friends and influence people apparently. Although she is quickly welcomed by Angie, a girl from the American compound, and introduced to her friends, Leeza, Jazzy and Tahira, Emma's candour and insistence on personal freedom place her at odds with several students, including Aisha, Mustapha's wealthy "promised" one, and Faarooq, protective and strict brother of Tahira.

All conflict is compounded when Mustapha continues to pay attention to Emma, much to Aisha's irritation, and Emma and Mustapha are thrown into a drama group with Faarooq and another boy Ali to produce a skit about conflict, first focusing on a racist American girl (hint?) and then on a Pakistani boy who likes a Canadian girl. And, although Emma enlists Angie's help to avoid being alone with Mustapha, knowing that she is attracted to him, she and Mustapha are repeatedly thrown together, sometimes because he chooses to be with her and sometimes because he wants to be kind. It all makes for much cultural and romantic confusion.

I can't imagine the transient lifestyle of foreign service families and the particular skills that the children must need to navigate new lives successfully. Couple that with divorced parents and living with a workaholic mother and in a tenuous political-religious situation, and you've got all the makings of a disaster. S. J. Laidlaw thankfully has given Emma the wicked sense of humour, common sense and heart to find a way to help Mandy and herself, as well as carve a niche for themselves in their new world. She finds a source of wisdom, recognizing the value in the kind and comforting Mr. Akbar, and has enough insight to recognize her own flaws and address them as she can.

S. J. Laidlaw could have imbued "An Infidel in Paradise" with the same resentment that is implied in the scathing indictment of "Infidel!" leveled against Emma but she does not. Instead, she plays with the idea that the safety of "inside", whether it be the compound, one's comfort zone or culture, and the danger of "outside"

is not always the case. It has more to do with perception and broaching that transition with caution in an effort to make both territories manageable. Even Emma is able to find herself accepting her new life as "An Infidel in Paradise."
