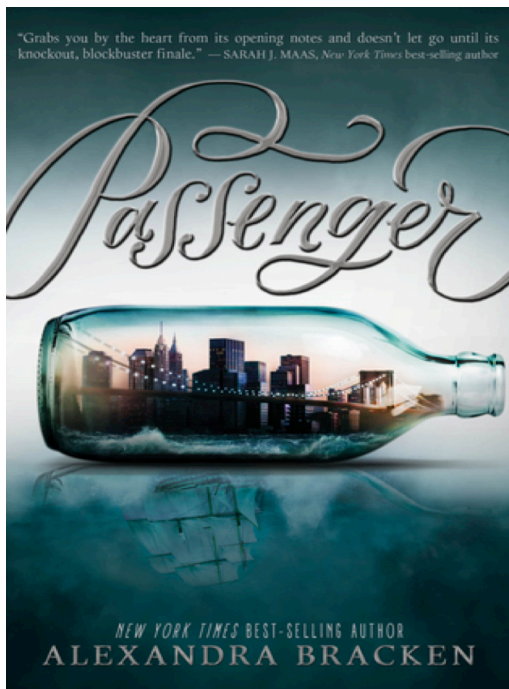


## Intertwining Past and Present



*Passenger* by Alexandra Bracken  
Disney Hyperion  
486 pages  
\$17.99 buy it [here](#) at the River's  
End bookstore

When Etta Spencer blacks out after the most important violin concert of her life she doesn't expect to wake up on a ship, let alone in 1776. After being told by the head of a time-traveling family that he's holding Etta's mother captive, she's sent on a wild goose chase to retrieve the astrolabe, an object that can create a passage to any place and time in the world. With no knowledge of time-traveling, Etta is left to navigate her task with the help of a curious young, Nicholas, man whom she just met. But with so many rules Etta's not aware of and other groups chasing after the same thing, will they make it out alive?

*Passenger*, the first in a duology, effortlessly brings readers around the world. Alexandra Bracken entwines the past with the present while tackling tough topics relevant in both centuries.

The novel starts off with a prologue set in Bhutan, 1910. Bracken spares no time emerging the reader right into history and time traveling.

"There was a boom and rattle from miles away, he knew the passage they'd come through had just collapsed. Blood roared in Nicholas' ears, chased by his own soundless scream; he did not need to look, to search through the haze and rain, to know that time itself had stolen Julian's broken body, and dissolved it into nothing but a memory

This is an overlying worry throughout *Passenger*. As Etta and Nicholas start their time-traveling journey you see that the danger in the prologue scene is a possible outcome to time hopping. There are so many rules (some of which are very complicated) that it's easy to forget and end up in a dangerous situation. As the novel progresses, Bracken instills more worry in her readers as to whether or not Etta and Nick will complete their task relatively unscathed. I couldn't put the book down; this constant fear kept me on edge and racing to get to the end of the book. I had to ensure that these two would come out of this alive.

“Oh my God,” Etta gasped, turning to look back at him. Her arm was outstretched, pointing at something orange and white a short distance away, half-hidden by foliage.

Nicholas’s eyes were fixed only on what was at her feet, and watched as its head rose up out of the mud behind her, scales glinting and slick as its hood flattened out. She must have stepped right on it and been none the wiser.”

*Passenger* doesn’t shy away from deeper topics such as gender and racial inequality. As a 21<sup>st</sup> century girl, Etta is a staunch believer in equal rights for women and minorities and is taken aback by the mistreatment of these groups. Nicholas himself is a product of the times he lives in, the outcome of a white man’s rape of his slave. When Nicholas sees Etta he instantly files a relationship with her under something he can never have. After all, pursuing such a relationship could very well cost Nick his life. With Etta being a woman and Nicholas being a person of color it makes navigating the streets of 1940 London or 1880 Paris increasingly harder for the pair.



One of the things that I admired the most about this book is Bracken’s sense of her characters. Nicholas and Etta both have ambitions outside of tracking down the astrolabe. This transforms the personalities of these characters from 2D to 3D, making them more real and relatable to readers. Yet neither Etta nor Nicholas spend time pitying themselves and dwelling on what they’ve lost out on. Rather, they buckle down to handle the cards they’ve been dealt.



Etta especially handles the situation smoothly considering she’s been ripped out of her relatively normal life in a blink of an eye. She may spend some time internally lamenting about how she misses her mom, (which, for the record, I would be doing a lot more of if I’d been transported onto a ship in 1776), but for the most part she’s not winging on about how unfair her situation is. Instead, she spends her time getting to work and solving the problem.

This may be a YA novel but the concepts and characters are for everyone. It’s not a coming-of-age story and there’s no love triangle. The only thing that makes this book classified as Young Adult is that fact that the protagonists are 17 and 19 years old. I commend Alexandra Bracken for beautifully intertwining her history and English backgrounds in *Passenger*. Its melodically beautiful narration tells more than just a story about romance and time-travel, but of history and family ties.

*Passenger's* follow up, *Wayfarer*, is due out January 3<sup>rd</sup> of 2017.

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