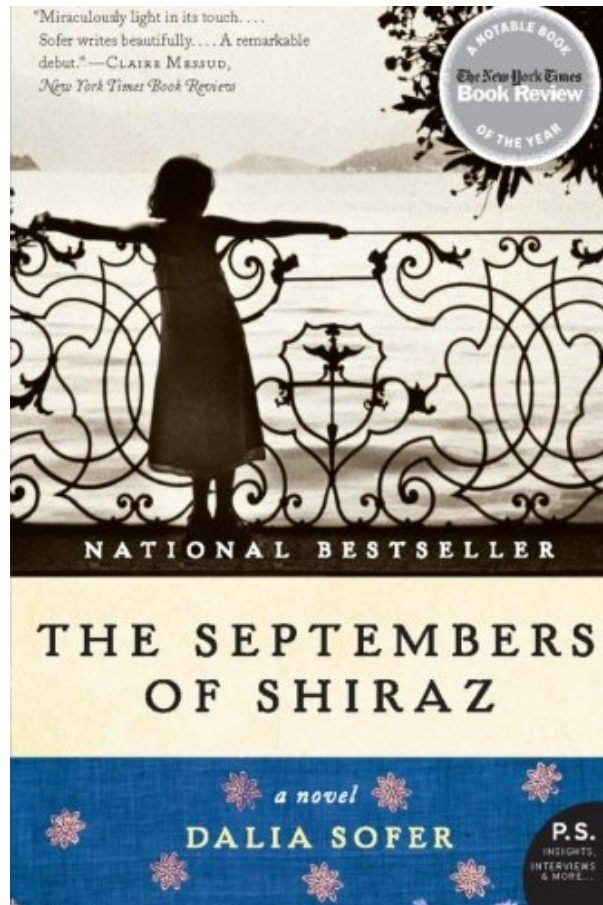
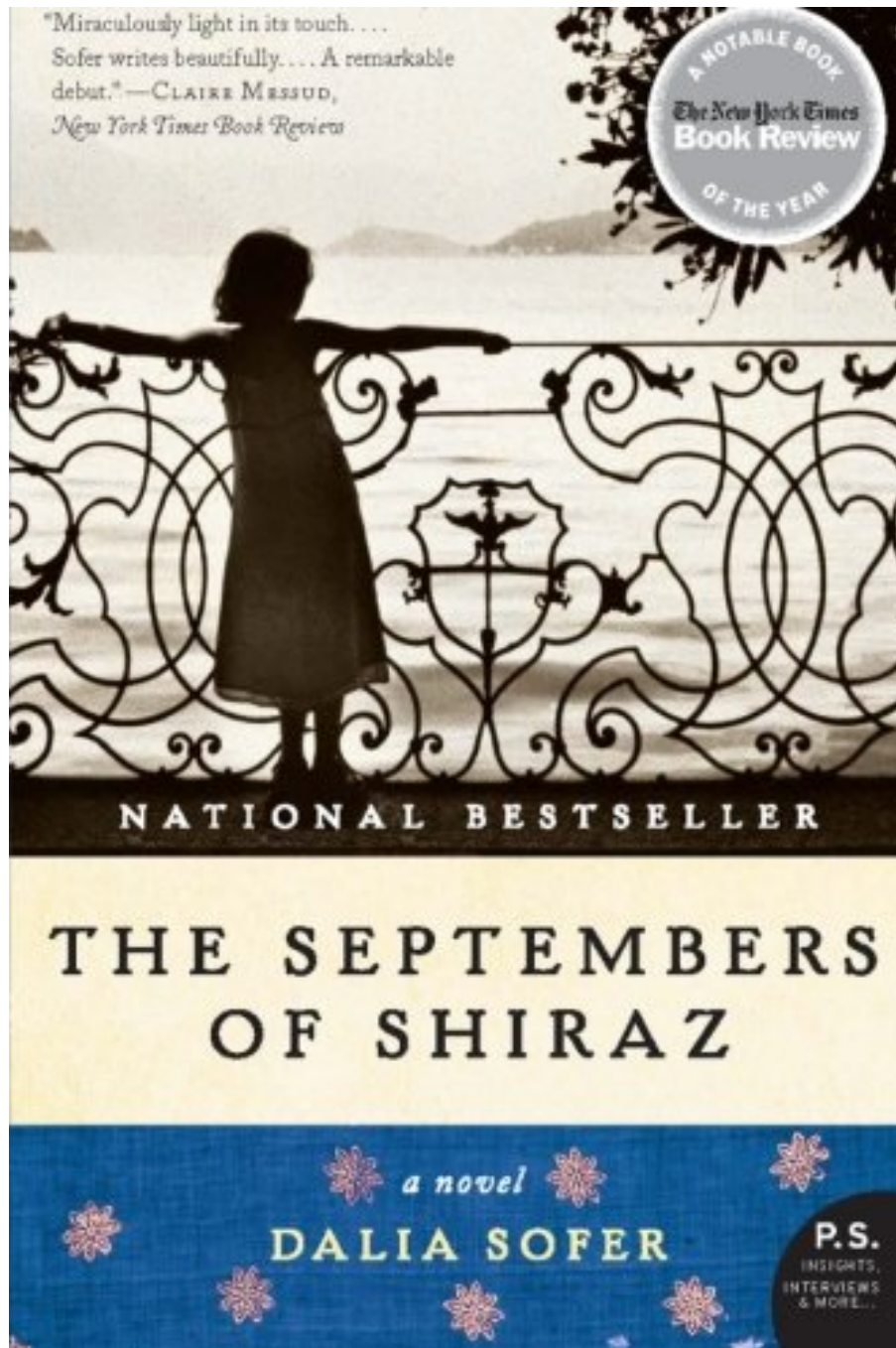


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From Publishers Weekly

Sofer's family escaped from Iran in 1982 when she was 10, an experience that may explain the intense detail of this unnerving debut. On a September day in 1981, gem trader Isaac Amin is accosted by Revolutionary Guards at his Tehran office and imprisoned for no other crime than being Jewish in a country where Muslim fanaticism is growing daily. Being rich and having had slender ties to the Shah's regime magnify his peril. In anguish over what might be happening to his family, Isaac watches the brutal mutilation and executions of prisoners around him. His wife, Farnaz, struggles to keep from slipping into despair, while his young daughter, Shirin, steals files from the home of a playmate whose father is in charge of the prison that holds her father. Far away in Brooklyn, Isaac's nonreligious son, Parviz, struggles without his family's money and falls for the pious daughter of his Hasidic landlord. Nicely layered, the story shimmers with past secrets and hidden motivations. The dialogue, while stiff, allows the various characters to come through. Sofer's dramatization of just-post-revolutionary Iran captures its small tensions and larger brutalities, which play vividly upon a family that cannot, even if it wishes to, conform. (Aug.)

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From Bookmarks Magazine

Dalia Sofer, who was forced to flee postrevolutionary Iran at the age of ten after her own father was unjustly imprisoned, captures her family's experiences in this moving, semiautobiographical tale. Citing Sofer's evocative prose, sensitive characterizations, and suspenseful plot, reviewers called Sofer's debut novel persuasive and memorable. Though she ruminates on themes of faith, love, and the heavy toll of political and religious oppression, Sofer's honesty and balanced outlook prevent the story from lapsing into sensational melodrama or lurid allegory. Her descriptions of torture, though vivid, are not gratuitously violent. A few small complaints included some contrived dialogue and Parviz's annoying self-pity, but critics agreed that these do not detract from an otherwise "powerful, timely book" (Rocky Mountain News).

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Soon to be a major motion picture starring Adrien Brody and Salma Hayek

In the aftermath of the Iranian revolution, rare-gem dealer Isaac Amin is arrested, wrongly accused of being a spy. Terrified by his disappearance, his family must reconcile a new world of cruelty and chaos with the collapse of everything they have known. As Isaac navigates the terrors of prison, and his wife feverishly searches for him, his children struggle with the realization that their family may soon be forced to embark on a journey of incalculable danger.

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- Released on: 2008-04-29
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- Binding: Paperback
- 368 pages

## Features

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- Condition: Used - Very Good
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Most helpful customer reviews

55 of 59 people found the following review helpful.

A nuanced tale of political and religious repression

By Jonathan Groner

This is an excellent first novel. Dalia Sofer tells the story of the Amin family, a wealthy Iranian-Jewish family caught up in the ugly repression that followed the overthrow of the shah, in a quiet, dignified style, with detail building upon detail. Jeweler Isaac Amin is snatched from his home and imprisoned by the Revolutionary Guards, for no other reason than the fact that he is affluent and Jewish. His efforts to convince his captors that he is no Israeli spy and end his Kafkaesque tortures and interrogations are described very convincingly.

Particularly notable are Sofer's efforts to portray the ideology of Amin's captors and their sympathizers and to give them a chance to speak for themselves. She does not countenance political murder, religious repression, or anti-semitism, far from it, and her sympathies are with the oppressed; but she does give her villains a voice. Why are some people the masters and some the servants? Was the Iranian upper class complicit in the repression conducted by the shah's goons before his overthrow? These are some of the questions that she asks and these help give the book considerable nuance.

I would have given this book five stars, but the ending failed to satisfy the emotional build-up of the previous 100 pages. The book seemed to peter out rather than to end in a meaningful way.

23 of 23 people found the following review helpful.

Lyrical Debut Novel

By A Reader

I purchased this book after seeing positive reviews in the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times. This

is one of the best books I've read, with tight yet lyrical language that enabled me, someone who's never been to Iran or been in a situation akin to that the Amin family faced, to enter their world and understand their changing feelings and actions. The characters were powerfully drawn, and the reader feels empathy for the dilemmas faced by Isaac, the imprisoned father, Farnaz, his somewhat estranged wife, Shirin, the daughter, and Parviz, the son so far away. And despite the tragic events, we see growth in how the characters see themselves and relate to each other. This book richly deserves the positive reviews it has received, and I wish Ms. Sofer a long and productive career!

74 of 85 people found the following review helpful.

"This revolution, like all others, wished to turn the citizens into one big family."

By Luan Gaines

This novel is a poignant tale of a family caught in the changing of the guard, transported into a world where their every move is suspect. On one uneventful day in 1981, after the Iranian revolution, gem trader Isaac Amin is arrested by the Revolutionary Guards in his Tehran office and transported to prison, where he is interrogated. As a Jew, Amin is immediately suspect, especially since his lucrative business takes him frequently to Israel. Now his entire world is threatened, the government suspicious that he is a spy for Israel. It doesn't help that Amin's brother has been smuggling alcohol over the border, in strict defiance of the law. Muslim fanaticism is on the rise, Isaac's family in the crosshairs, as Jews and because of their wealthy lifestyle.

While Isaac is left in a dank cell with other men, all to be systematically interrogated, he ponders the viability of ever leaving this place, let alone surviving the increasingly brutal interrogation techniques used to obtain the desired responses from the prisoners. Daily he listens to the firing squads, the moans from fellow prisoners who have been tortured and the muezzin's call to prayer. Regretting that he could not inform his wife, Farnaz, of his dire circumstances, Amin looks inward, revisiting the early days of their marriage, before they became careless of the relationship. Learning of her husband's fate, Farnaz is thrust into despair, fighting the depression that overwhelms her whenever she considers life without Isaac, navigating the days as if a sleepwalker.

Nine-year-old Shirin is told at first that her father is on an extended trip; but she is aware of her mother's anguish and seeks to alleviate Farnaz' pain by hoarding her own fears, hiding files she has stolen from the home of a friend whose father works for the Revolutionary Guards. Meanwhile, Parviz, the son attending college in New York, battles his own intense isolation in the city, waiting for money from home that never arrives. In coded phone calls, Parviz understands that his father is in jeopardy, the future uncertain. Each family member endures this painful isolation, existing in a sort of stasis, unsure how to resolve their dilemma, escaping the frightening circumstances of their days by remembering softer, kinder times, the Septembers of Shiraz.

The very fabric of their lives destroyed by the revolution, Isaac is inextricably tied to the shah's regime; there is literally no future for this family save escape. It is that painful truth that so defines the daily activities of each: Isaac's delivery into the hands of his torturers, desperate to avoid the fate of his fellow prisoners; Farnaz' gradual acceptance of a future without the luxuries she has long taken for granted, vaguely threatened but unable to take action; Shirin's theft of the dossiers that may bring swift and brutal repercussions to her doorstep; the once-loyal house servant who makes increasingly critical judgments of her employers and may be a spy; and Parviz' longing for family connections far from those he loves. Balancing the brutality of revolution with one family's fragile hopes, Sofer illustrates the chaos and fear of a world turned upside down, the Amin's driven to seek safety far from home. Luan Gaines/2007.

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