

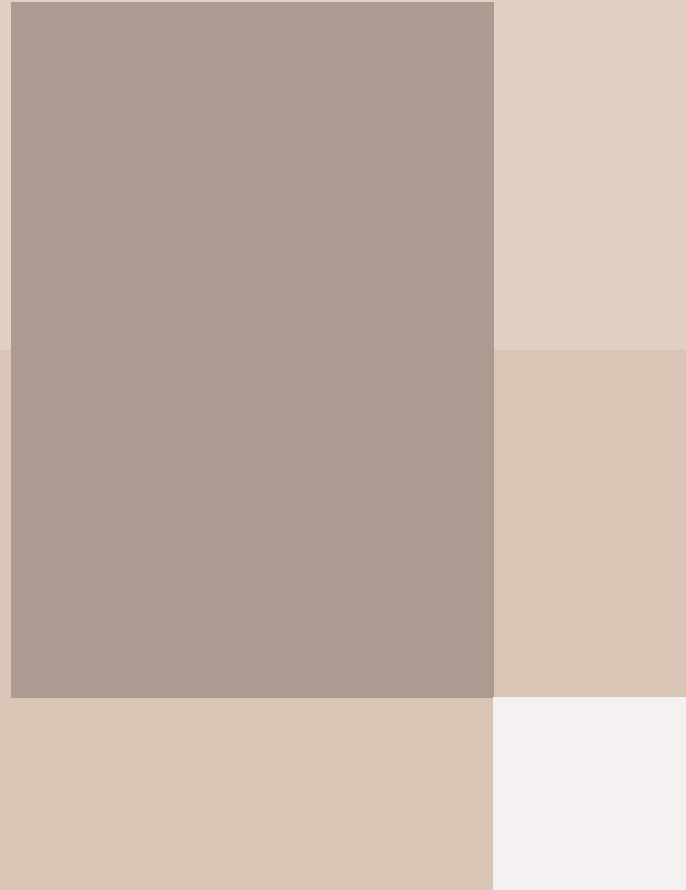
# Alif the Unseen

1. Alif and Intisar break up
  - a. Leads to acquisition of *Alf Yeom* and Creation of 'Tin Sari'
2. The Hand hacks Alif's computer
  - a. Alif and Dina now on the run
3. They seek out the help of Vikram the Vampire
  - a. Introduction to Jinn world
4. They seek out information on Alf Yeom
  - a. Introduction of the Convert/the hidden alley
5. Big Police Chase
  - a. Siege on major mosque → lots of things
6. Alif in Prison (3 months)
  - a. Battle between good and evil
7. Adventure into Empty Quarter
  - a. Reunited with old friends
8. Final Battle against the Hand
  - a. Hand is defeated by Alif/Alf Yeom and revolution begins



## Summary

# History and Culture



# A Brief History of The Middle East



600 – 900s CE

*The Thousand and One Nights* is told and compiled. The stories are rooted in Arabic, Egyptian, Indian, Persian, and more cultures.

1919

The League of Nations led by President Woodrow Wilson mandates boundaries in the Middle East.

1936 – 1980s

Oil is discovered in the Middle East and the U.S. gets involved to acquire it and stop communism.

1973 – 1974

OPEC places an oil embargo on the U.S. for its actions in the Arab-Israeli war.

1990 – 1991

The Gulf War begins as the U.S. and Saddam Hussein battle for oil.

2010 – 2012

The Arab Spring occurs throughout many countries in the Middle East.

# The Arab Spring

- **Events**
  - Tunisia
    - Protests sparked after a young man sets himself on fire to protest police brutality and the President's regime. The President is ousted 10 days later.
  - Protests spread to several other countries:
    - The Egyptian president resigns.
    - Protests lead to civil war in Libya and Syria.
    - Tunisia holds their first free election.
    - Yemen's president relinquishes power after years of protests.
- ***Alif the Unseen***
  - The story leads up to the events of the Arab Spring.



# Culture in the Middle East



## Class

- In the Middle East
  - The middle class in Arab Spring countries are important in instigating protests.
- In *Alif the Unseen*
  - Alif is from the Lower to Middle Class Area, known as the Baqara District. Other parts of town include the Old Quarter, New Quarter, and working class neighborhoods.
  - Divisions within classes exist in the book as well.

## Race

1. In the Middle East
  - The Middle East has the largest number of Indian immigrants.
  - Oil boom created job opportunities. Migrants came from countries with large populations of unskilled workers
  - Prejudice exists against non-Arab migrants.
2. In *Alif the Unseen*
  - Alif is half Indian and half Arab, and experiences tension because of his racial and religious differences.

# Discussion Question:

The American Convert is described as being half-in and half-out of the Jinn world. What is the significance of Alif being half-in and half-out, racially, of the Arab world?

Why does the book focus on Alif, who is not particularly religious and seems to have few political convictions, rather than someone like Dina (who is religious) or New Quarter (who acts out of strong political convictions)?

Jinn





## What is a jinn?

“Hidden ones”

Neither good nor evil

Made out of fire

Have free will

Associated with trickery



# Types of Jinn

## Effrit

Cunning,  
intelligent  
Changeable

## Ghoul

Demonic  
Incapable of  
goodness

## Marid

Most powerful  
Often male

## Sila

Shape-shifters  
Often female

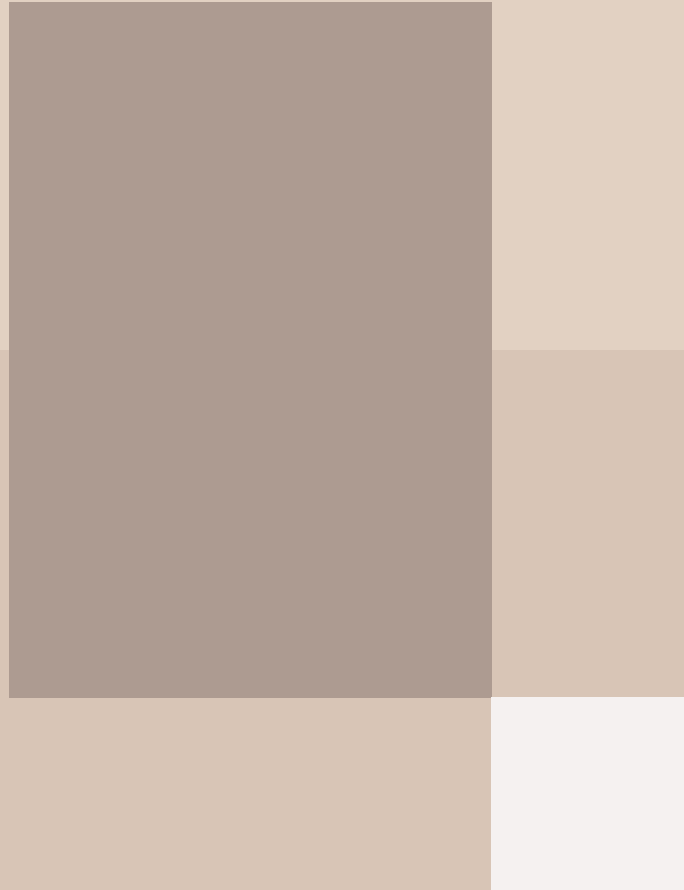
## Vetala

semi-evil  
In Indian  
folklore  
Possess  
human  
corpses

# Discussion Question

What is the role of the jinn in the novel? Why do you think G. Willow Wilson decided to portray jinn the way she did in the novel? How would the novel have changed without the jinn?

Genre



## Cyberpunk

- Subgenre of science fiction
- Advanced technology
- Dystopian future
- Private security forces vs. low-life “underworld”
- Political and social corruption
- Protagonist is typically an outsider, criminal, or misfit

## Quantum Fiction

- Any story that witnesses life and the human experience on a subatomic level
- Perception of reality as a “spectrum of realness”
- Duality, contrasting binaries are entangled and develop character identity
- Character authorship
- Uncertainty and ambiguity

# Discussion Question:

Why does G. Willow Wilson choose to write a fantasy, cyberpunk story?

What function does the fantasy genre serve?

How does the genre influence our engagement with the novel?

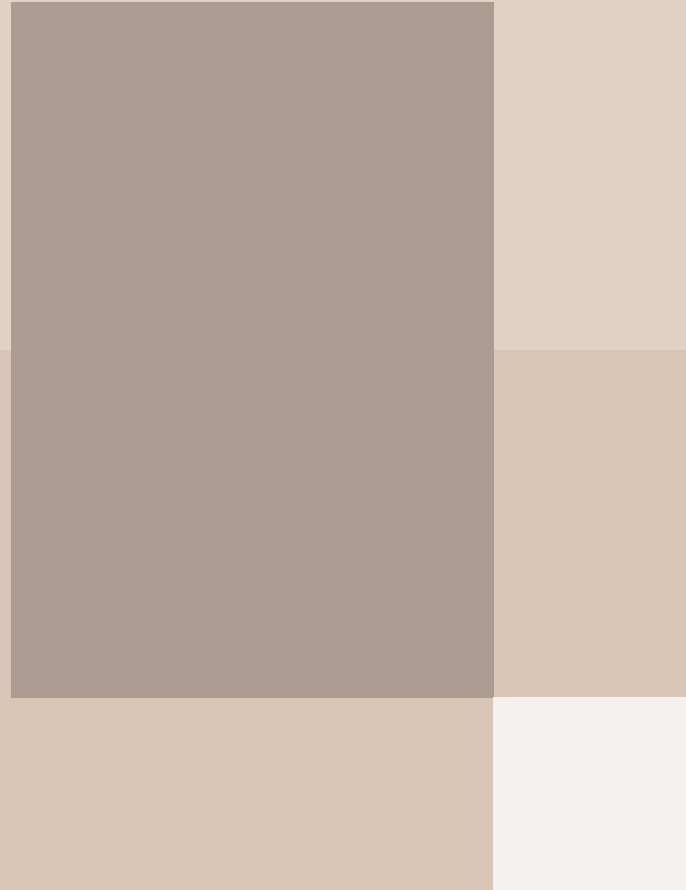
## Excerpt from An Interview with the Author

“In many countries in the Middle East... for a long time censorship of books and film was a very big deal. There were books you couldn't buy, things with political content would be censored, but there were some genres of books and film that the censors just didn't understand. They didn't understand that below these fantasy themes, which they thought to be very childish, were these powerful political messages... All they see is the surface metaphor. They don't really get what these books are saying.” (451)



What preconceptions do you have about veiling?

# Veiling





“



*He could not have guessed the world she had created for herself. Sewn into the underside of her long outer cloak were patches of bright silk, patterned, beaded, spangled with points of light.*

# Types of Muslim veils



There are four different types of headscarves:

- ❑ The Hijab-covers the head & neck
- ❑ \*The Niqab\*-covers entire body, neck, & face- only eyes are showing
- ❑ The Chador- body length shawl
- ❑ The Burqa- full body veil. One sees through a mesh screen.

# Veiling

Although typically muslim veils have been stereotyped as oppressive, they can also be a symbol of empowerment.

- ❑ Dina's relationship with veiling
- ❑ The significance of Dina letting Alif underneath her veil.



# Discussion Question:

How did Alif's perspective on veiling shift over the course of the book?

Did your perception shift?

# Other Discussion Questions

- How do the “unseen” elements of the novel relate to each other?
  - Cyberspace
  - Dina’s veil
  - The Jinn world
  - Knowledge
  - Language
  - God

# Other Discussion Questions

- Dina says that metaphors are dangerous. Does she still believe this at the end of the novel?
- In Ch. 0, the jinn says of the Alf Yeom, “When you hear it, you will become someone else” (7). How are we different after we read this novel?

# Thanks!

Any questions?

