



SAMIRA AHMED'S
MAD, BAD & DANGEROUS TO KNOW
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Khayyam's very first words to the reader are, "I live in between spaces." Why does she feel that way? How do those words foreshadow one of the novel's themes?
- 2) Why does Leila hate the title of "haseki" when it means "the favored?" And how does her first chapter foreshadow her destiny—both while she was alive and after her death?
- 3) Look at Delacroix's paintings [Combat of the Giaour and the Pasha](#) and [The Combat of the Giaour and Hassan](#). What story do the images in the painting tell? What questions do the paintings leave unanswered?
- 4) Khayyam, Leila, Alexandre, Zaid, Byron, and Dumas all conceal things or tell lies. What are the different prices they pay for their lies? Are some lies justified? Do some lies "weigh" more than others?
- 5) Why is Khayyam hesitant about sharing Leila's story with the world when she and Alexandre finally start discovering the real truth? Why does she change her mind? Was that the right choice?
- 6) Who decides what history is written and what stories are pushed aside? How does racism and patriarchy play a role in that? What criteria would you use to decide what stories and accomplishments deserve to be known and remembered?
- 7) Why does Leila tell Byron, "I have much more to fear from men than jinn?" Does that ring true in her life?
- 8) Different men tried to use Khayyam and Leila as means to their desired ends. How do Khayyam and Leila fight that?
- 9) Khayyam and Leila lived in very different times but both struggle to find their voice and tell their own story. What similar forces were they fighting against? What societal change allowed Khayyam to have more freedoms than Leila? How did she choose to use that power and privilege? Why does Leila choose to finally write her own story?
- 10) What is eternal return? How does it play out in the novel? Is it real?

