

Guantanamo Boy Study Guide

Guantanamo Boy by Anna Perera

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Guantanamo Boy Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1 and 2.....	4
Chapters 3 and 4.....	7
Chapters 5 and 6.....	10
Chapters 7 and 8.....	14
Chapters 9 and 10.....	17
Chapters 11 and 12.....	20
Chapters 13 and 14.....	23
Chapters 15 and 16.....	25
Chapters 17 and 18.....	27
Chapters 19 and 20.....	29
Chapters 21 and 22.....	32
Chapters 23 and 24.....	35
Chapters 25 and 26.....	38
Chapters 27 and 28.....	41
Chapters 29 and 30.....	44
Characters.....	47
Symbols and Symbolism.....	54
Settings.....	57
Themes and Motifs.....	60
Styles.....	62
Quotes.....	64



Plot Summary

Guantanamo Boy is a fictional account of a fifteen year old young man named Khalid who lives with his family in Manchester, England. His interests include hanging out with his mates, playing football, and playing a myriad of games on line with his cousin Tariq and others. His parents are not rigid Muslims, but respect and discipline are expected. It is just before Easter vacation when Khalid learns of his grandmothers' death and the intention his parents have of taking their family to visit relatives in Pakistan during the upcoming break.

Within days of their arrival, his father disappears and Khalid, terrified that some misfortune has befallen him, goes out in search. Though he is unsuccessful, Khalid is inadvertently put on a path that will lead to his own abduction from his Auntie's home. While the rest of the family sleeps, he is taken by masked men who are carrying guns. The men bind his hands and feet and tape his mouth before dragging him out and throwing him into a vehicle. He is driven to an unknown location where his nightmare is unending.

During the next two years, not knowing whether his father is alive or dead, Khalid is subjected to the kind of torture that many adult men could not survive. He is taken to different holding facilities where he is relentlessly badgered and abused until he finally signs a printed confession to stop his captors from water boarding him any further. This bogus confession is used as a reason to send him to Guantanamo Bay where he will remain until shortly after his seventeenth birthday.

Before his abduction, Khalid is a young man whose main interests are football, video games, and hanging out with his mates. He is stunned to discover that a game his cousin Tariq invents called Bomber One is largely responsible for his incarceration. Filled with hatred, he vows revenge. Time passes, and his captors continue to torture him using random methods. They try to get him to confirm his original confession or elaborate on details of his plans to bomb certain targets. He goes for periods without food and water, alternating cold and heat, and all forms of dehumanizing treatment designed to force him to reveal his co-conspirators. He suffers a gradual emotional and mental decline. He begins to see things that aren't there and spends more and more time living in his mind and memories. He counts the time between any routines such as trips from the barber to the showers to meal times. When a lawyer finally shows up and introduces himself, Khalid can scarcely believe it is actually happening. From that time forward, his treatment by the guards changes. The conditions of his incarceration change and begin to improve in small but meaningful ways. By the time Khalid is actually released, he is seventeen years old and emotionally fragile. His integration back into family and home life is difficult, and his views of life and the people in his life have changed dramatically.



Chapters 1 and 2

Summary

Chapters 1 and 2

Guantanamo Boy is a fictional account of a fifteen year old young man named Khalid who lives with his family in Manchester, England. His interests include hanging out with his mates, playing football, and playing a myriad of games on line with his cousin, Tariq and others. His parents are not rigid Muslims, but respect and discipline is expected. It is just before Easter vacation when Khalid learns of his grandmothers' death and the intention his parents have of taking their family to visit relatives in Pakistan during the upcoming break.

Khalid had come home from school to find a letter to his parents. He is disappointed that the science teacher, Mr. Hanwood, had actually followed through with his threat to write to his parents about his recent behavior in class. He puts the letter in his pocket, trying to behave in a normal fashion while looking for a good time to show his father the reprimand. Thirty minutes later, he sits on the couch with his father, unable to bring himself to give the letter to him.

After doing his homework, he goes to the park where he meets with his friends Nico, Holgy, Mikael, and Tony. When he gets there, he pulls out the letter that came from school, expecting the worst and opens it to discover that it is actually just a message to his father soliciting his participation in the school fete being held the following term.

The next night, Khalid's mother informs them all at the dinner table that they will be going to Karachi for Easter break. Khalid begins complaining immediately, wanting to know why they can't go to Lahore, instead. At least there, he could visit with his cousin; but, his mother informs him that one of his grandparents has just died which is the reason they are going. She begins to make a list of the things they'll need to take, and Khalid gives up all hope of having a decent Easter holiday with his mates. He is going to sit down at the computer, but his mother asks him to go to the new shop on the main road for tamarind paste and chilli powder. Reluctantly, he goes.

Holgy and Tony are outside Rashid's Electricals. They tell him that something happened at the park, and the gates have been locked early as a result. Khalid hears about a party at Mikael's, and he is about to get details when he sees a couple of 'steroid heads' from school picking on a woman. He intervenes, pushing them aside. He apologizes to her on their behalf. She barely bothers to thank him and leaves. By the time he gets to the store, he's forgotten what he is supposed to be buying. He has tea with the owner of the shop, Nasir. He tells Khalid the reasons why they should be careful.

When Khalid gets home, he decides to ask his cousin Tariq about it. His cousin tells him that questions like that can get him killed, explaining how paranoid people are there.



Later, his father explains that he has been saving his entire life for moments like this one, so that when the call comes he is able to go to Pakistan and help.

Analysis

Khalid is a typical teenager in England. His interests don't extend very far beyond the games he plays on line, the times he spends with his mates, and football. School is but a necessary evil, sometimes seeming more trouble than it is worth, despite his awareness that an education is necessary. His parents demand respect and expect discipline from him. Although their origins are in Pakistan, they are not rigid about their religion, nor do they expect Khalid or his sisters to be. Khalid's father is the kind of man who rules by example, setting high standards for his son and showing his disappointment when they are not met. That is a large part of the reason that Khalid hides the letter from his school when he comes across it, believing that it is a complaint about him from one of his teachers. Later, he discovers the letter had nothing to do with him. Aside from football and time with his mates, his greatest interest is in playing a game online with his cousin Tariq. Tariq is two years his senior, but he often makes him feel like so much more of a junior with his worldly attitude and demeanor. Khalid idolizes his cousin. despite his mother's open disapproval of the amount of time he spends talking to him.

When Khalid learns the family will be going to Karachi for Easter break, he makes no secret of his disappointment, complaining that he'd much rather go to Lahore where at least his cousin would be good company. His mother quickly chastises him for his selfishness, informing him of his grandmother's recent passing and her husband's need to help his sisters relocate. Feeling like a heel, he tries to defend himself by reminding them that he didn't know that when he spoke; but, the damage is done, and he knows it. One look at his father's face says it all. He tries to make up for it by helping his mother clean up the kitchen and running an errand for her. While he is out, he learns of the dangers in Karachi from a local shop owner, and he can hardly believe some of the things he is hearing. He discusses them later with Tariq who assures him that the stories are true and that even questions such as the ones he is asking can cause more trouble than he would ever believe.

Discussion Question 1

What happens at school that gets Khalid into trouble in school? What assumptions are made as a result?

Discussion Question 2

Why do Khalid's father and mother want to go to Karachi? How does his father explain the reasons for the trip?



Discussion Question 3

What does Nasir tell Khalid about Karachi and the political situation there? How does Khalid feel about it?

Vocabulary

Barrage, complexity, implement, defuse, adrenalin, submission, illiteracy, xenophobe, contempt.



Chapters 3 and 4

Summary

Chapters 3 and 4

The plane lands in Karachi and Khalid is immediately struck by the mayhem of the area and the stifling heat. They pile into an old taxi and begin the journey through the city while his father delivers parcels and notes for friends at home to their family and friends in Karachi. His father points out places from his childhood. They finally reach his aunt's home – a box with windows that does little to impress Khalid.

After the initial greetings are over, gifts are given and tea is had, Khalid becomes bored, and one of his aunt's takes him out of the room and shows him their small computer room. She encourages him to use it. It takes only a short time before he overcomes the language difference and manages to find his way to Tariq's game. They play until jet-lag overtakes him, and he signs off.

The next few days settle into a routine. He begins with breakfast and then watches over his Uncle Amir while his aunt does the marketing. People stop by regularly, and he chats with them about current events – an earthquake in northern Afghanistan taking up most of the news. One man, Abdullah, strikes Khalid as strange, talking only of Islam during his visits, popping in each day in an attempt to get Khalid's father to join him at his mosque. Though Khalid doesn't speak Urdu, Abdullah translates it all without being asked. In the afternoon, his Aunt's nap and Khalid gets into the habit of doing so as well, to catch up on the sleep he misses from playing on the computer all night long with Tariq. More players have now joined in – one from Iraq, two from Egypt, one in America and one even from Australia. Together they plan the annihilation of an imaginary place called Arch Parkway, creating strategies and though the game is a bit basic, they all enjoy the time spent.

At five in the morning, his mother comes down in a state and announces that his father is gone. After chastising him for playing all night, she gives him the address of the apartment his father went to and asks him to retrace his path and find him. Khalid showers and has a bite to eat before going out, while his mother looks up the address and tries to give him directions. Khalid takes the map from her and reassures her before leaving, confident that he will find the place. When he turns the first corner, he sees a crowd up ahead. People are shouting with their fists in the air. He is dressed similarly to them, wearing the brown shalwar kameez that his Aunt Fatima had given him. The dust irritates his eyes. As he tries to get information from a stall owner, a white man speaks to him with a Liverpool accent, asking if he is lost and introducing himself as Jim. Jim helps him find the address where his father was supposed to have gone, but they find no trace of him. Jim walks him back to the street his aunts live on and gives him his mobile number, telling him that if there is anything he can do to help he should call.



Khalid hopes his dad is already back and the worrying is for nothing. However, the moment he opens the door, he knows that his dad isn't.

Analysis

As they ready to board the plane for Karachi, Khalid's father again demonstrates his selflessness as he offers an old man his seat after hearing his mention that he would struggle with lack of sleep next to the toilets, doing so before Khalid had a chance to and Khalid is mildly put out that the man doesn't so much as thank him. Khalid is excited to be on the way to Karachi. His mind goes back to the party he'd attended at Mikael's on the weekend, and his brief but so pleasant encounter with Niamh. Khalid wonders if he'll ever have the courage to ask her out.

Khalid is struck by how busy Karachi is when they land, and how disorganized it all seems. He also is slammed by the heat, which his father assures him is usual. They get a taxi and take a roundabout route to his aunt's home – a concrete box that does little to impress Khalid. He endures tea and the family visitations until one of his aunts feels sorry for him and shows him to a small room which houses a computer and little else. She encourages him to use it, and Khalid's spirits lift. He manages to sort his way through the language differences, and meets Tariq on line for a game of Bomber One. They play with others who have joined in until jet lag overcomes him and he signs off.

The days settle into a routine, and Khalid finds that he enjoys the constant coming and going of neighbors and friends who stop in to chat and share current events. He is constantly struck by how friendly everyone is and how polite they all seem to be. He can't imagine a similar thing occurring in the fish and chips shop at home. The only one he doesn't care for specifically is a man named Abdullah. Abdullah is only twenty six years old, but he is already firmly entrenched in Islam and talks of nothing else. He tries to convince Khalid's father to attend mosque with him, but his Dad declines, finding his mannerism too serious as well. Khalid takes to napping with his aunts in the afternoon to offset long nights of game playing with Tariq and others who have joined in. Bomber One is the game they play, plotting strategies for bombing imaginary cities. The game is a bit simplistic, however, and Khalid secretly wishes he could play something else. But, he doesn't say so.

Khalid wonders if he should even bother with going to bed. He considers answering email from Nico, wondering why he is talking about Niamh and worrying that Nico likes her as well. He reads the email again and considers asking Niamh if she is seeing anyone, but he worries that his questions will reveal that he likes her. If Nico likes her, too, then he will have the advantage of the distance that currently separates them. So, he doesn't reply.

Early in the morning, his mother comes downstairs in a state. She is frantic because Khalid's father went to look at a flat the day before and hadn't returned. She is convinced that something bad has happened to her husband, and she cannot be convinced otherwise. She asks Khalid to retrace his route and he agrees, leaving after a



shower and a bite to eat, armed with a map of the area. He rounds a corner on the first street and gets caught in a surge of pedestrian traffic. He feels a sense of suffocation and fears falling, finally managing to work his way to an area just beyond the man yelling on a platform. Imitating the behavior of those around him makes it easier to move. Soon he is out of the throng, laughing to himself. He meets a man named Jim who notices him trying to get information with a map. Jim offers his help. Jim also warns him of the dangers of the region, from traffickers to backhanders to CIA agents seeking al-Qaeda in every face and looking for dirty bombs. After checking the flat and not finding his father, they return to the street that Khalid's aunts live on. Jim tries to distract Khalid with discussions about a girl he fancies. For a brief time it works, making Khalid think about Niamh and their last meeting. However, when he returns to his aunt's house, he knows the minute he opens the door that his father has not yet returned.

Discussion Question 1

What differences strike Khalid about Karachi from the moment they land? What other cultural differences does he see as the days pass?

Discussion Question 2

What is different about Abdullah? How do Khalid and his father feel about him? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What happens that makes Khalid's mother so frantic. Why are her concerns justified?

Vocabulary

Mayhem, modesty, complicated, persuade, annihilation, imaginary, suffocation, westernized, cooperate, suspicious, confidence, adrenaline.



Chapters 5 and 6

Summary

Chapters 5 and 6

When Khalid enters his Aunts' living room, a sea of faces turns to him expectantly. Everyone fires questions off at once, and he quietly tells them that he has no news. He slips out into the kitchen and putting some cushions on the floor, he falls into an exhausted sleep. Constant interruptions finally get him up. He tries to sleep in bed, but after much tossing and turning, he gives up. He goes down to the computer, hoping to find an email that will somehow explain his father's disappearance, and finds Abdullah sitting at it. He closes the page and tells Khalid he can go back to his game, and Khalid realizes that he probably didn't log off, giving Abdullah that information. He tells Khalid that he only goes on line to read the local newspapers. After he leaves, Khalid finds three emails – one from Tariq, one from Nico and one from Jamie from school. Someone bangs on the door as food is being brought out, and Khalid sees Jim standing there. He has stopped on his way to the airport to see if everything is okay. Khalid fills him in, and Jim suggests they check hospitals. However, that has already been done. He leaves after wishing Khalid luck and a good Easter holiday. Khalid can't help but think about Rochdale and chocolate Easter eggs.

Abdullah comes up behind him and questions him about Jim. Khalid doesn't like the suspicious look on Abdullah's face or the feeling in his stomach as he feels obliged to justify himself. Later, a decision is made to go to the police in the morning and a group of men puts together a list of questions to ask. Khalid goes back on the computer and tells Tariq what is happening. Tariq had already heard the news from his father, and sends him some online articles referring to the war on terror and the steps being taken. Then he suggests playing Bomber One as a distraction. For a while, Khalid loses himself in the game. He pauses for a trip to the bathroom, and the front door swings open as he is returning. Thinking it is his father finally, he turns to discover a gang of men with black cloth wrapped around their heads, dressed in dark shalwar kameez. Angry eyes approach him, and he is too shocked to do anything as hands clamp his mouth shut, then cover it with duct tape. He is handcuffed and kicked. A hood is placed over his head. Khalid pleads for help from his missing father. Then, the men pick him up and dump him in the back of a truck. Whenever the truck's motion causes him to roll one way or the other, Khalid is kicked back to the center.

Khalid's head is pounding as the truck stops. He is carried into a building where his hood is taken off, and he notices that one of his captors might be a Westerner because he has blue eyes. The tape is ripped from his mouth, and a Pakistani man takes him into a grey room. Khalid sits as the man takes off his ankle cuffs and takes the watch Khalid's father gave him for Christmas, putting it in his pocket before beginning his interrogation. He asks Khalid what he was doing in Pakistan, shows him a blurry photograph, and asks him the identity of the man.



Khalid finally asks for a lawyer but the request is denied. He is told that in Karachi, he has no rights. The fact that he is only fifteen doesn't seem to matter either. Khalid yells and swears when they leave him alone in the room. He finally lies down on the concrete and sleeps. When he wakes, he decides his best bet is to follow the advice Jim gave him and to cooperate fully. He is confident he will be released in a matter of hours.

A young Pakistani enters with tea and flat bread. Khalid doesn't touch it, and the man takes it with him when he leaves a few minutes later, without having spoken a word. Next a woman enters. She introduces herself and the questions begin again. She asks him what he was doing in Afghanistan, claiming to have his passport to prove it, although Khalid knows his father had it with him. He asks her where his father is, this time confusing her as he explains that his father is missing. Another man named James tells him to cooperate. He reveals that they already have the others, confusing Khalid further still.

When they take him back out to the truck, Khalid begins to think for the first time that he won't be going home. He is taken to an extravagant building where two other men, Dan and Bobby, question him again. They ask the same questions as the others had already asked, threatening to take him to Kandahar. He is taken to another room, and he begs the guard for help. The guard refuses by saying it is against the rules. He is left alone after one guard returns with a thin blanket and another brings him a meal of chicken curry. He curls up on the rug and examines the patterns to keep from going crazy. He thinks of his father.

Analysis

It seems as though the entire neighborhood is waiting for news when Khalid returns, but he has nothing to share. His aunts wring their hands anxiously while Gul and Aadam sit shaken and pale, close to losing their composure. He doesn't mention the demonstration. Half the room gestures to heaven for help while the rest sound off with ideas and suggestions. No one notices him slip out again. He tries to sleep, but after tossing and turning, gives up. Abdullah is at the computer when he goes. When Khalid opens the door, he immediately closes the window he was looking at. Khalid asks him what he's doing there, and Abdullah explains that he uses the computer with permission to check the news, but he hadn't done so since he and his family arrived. Now he was just catching up. He gets up and tells him that he can go back to his game now, and Khalid gets a strange feeling of invasion of privacy. He goes on line to check the mail after Abdullah assures him he isn't a spy. Jim shows up at the door to see if Khalid's father has returned. After he leaves, Abdullah grills Khalid about who he is, where they met, and what he wanted. Khalid resents having to explain any of it. Later he goes back to the computer. Khalid tells Tariq what's happening. After discussing current efforts to thwart the war on terror, they immerse themselves in Bomber One again. After playing for some time, he gets up to use the restroom. He is returning just as the front door opens. Instead of his father returning, Khalid sees a gang of men enter with their heads covered with black cloths. They quickly subdue and cuff Khalid, kicking him after taping his mouth shut. All Khalid can do is plead for his father's help as they drag him silently



from the house. He is put in the back of a truck and kicked repeatedly as they drive over potholed roads. All the while, Khalid is wondering whether they plan to kill him and throw him out of the truck.

What is happening to Khalid is so far removed from his ordinary life that he is having trouble absorbing what is going on. He wonders if this is what happened to his father, and he thinks about the things Nasir and Tariq have told him about current events in this region. He still can't understand why they would want him, convinced it must be a mistake. He knows his mother and sisters will go out of their minds when they realize he is missing. When the truck stops, he is taken into a building and interrogated, but the more questions that are asked, the more confused he becomes. None of it makes any sense, including the fact that he is denied a lawyer and told that he has no rights. His young age makes no difference either.

After they leave him in the room, he rants and raves at the walls, angry with himself for not having put his cell phone in his pocket. Finally, he falls asleep on the concrete floor. When he wakes, sore from head to toe, he cries until he is exhausted. By morning, he is again trying to convince himself that they have the wrong person. He is shuffled from one place to another and threatened. He is questioned repeatedly by different people. As time passes, he is less sure that he will be released. He remembers his father taking him to an Oriental rug sale and how at the time he hadn't appreciated the beauty his father saw. Now, he occupies his mind with the intricate patterns of the rug in the room he is held in. Khalid is sorry that it has taken this to show him what his father meant. He grasps at this link to his father to keep from going crazy; wishing a genie or jinn would come and carry him away.

Discussion Question 1

What disturbs Khalid when he goes to the computer room to see if there is any news of his father and why?

Discussion Question 2

How is Khalid taken, and under what circumstances? What is his initial reaction to his situation?

Discussion Question 3

What link to his father does Khalid discover as he is held in the posh building he has been taken to? What does he realize when he remembers this link?

Vocabulary

Oasis, delirium, immaculate, intervene, demonstration, bewildered, cubicles, intricate, geometric.



Chapters 7 and 8

Summary

Chapters 7 and 8

In the morning another guard brings Khalid tea and stale bread which he hungrily consumes. The guard turns his back and Khalid leaps on him. Before he can subdue the guard's yelling brings several more that stand pointing their guns at him. He lets go and sinks to the floor where the guards kick him until his nose bleeds and he vomits. He lies there until he falls asleep, and when he wakes in the dark he panics, in pain from one end to the other. Lights come on, and he is taken to another room where he is left with just one man who handcuffs one hand to a chair. Khalid examines himself in the light and shows the remaining guard the bruises he's sustained, but the guard doesn't seem to care. He leaves and returns with a bottle of water, smiling as Khalid downs it. The guard talks to someone at the door who leaves and returns shortly afterward with a slice of thin warm bread. Khalid stuffs it all in his mouth at once, trying to convey his hunger.

The next morning he wakes with a vague recollection of a guard coming in and cuffing his wrists together behind him so that he can lie down on the floor. He was also given a blanket that smelled. His arms ache after having them shackled behind his back all night. As close as he can tell, he has been a captive for five days. The door opens, and a guard offers him the use of a toilet. He asks the guard what they want from him, and the guard tells him the Americans want him. But, Khalid doesn't believe that. He asks why, but the guard just shrugs. A cloth is used to cover his eyes as he is taken to the washroom, and he is quickly returned to the plain room from before. When the guard leaves, he kicks the door and yells until the door opens again. Two guards approach, and one puts a cloth over his head. He is led to another room where the cloth is removed, and the door is closed behind him. Another scruffy looking man sits handcuffed on the concrete floor. He introduces himself as Masud Al-Dossadi. Khalid introduces himself as being only fifteen and tells him he was kidnapped and beaten and his watch was stolen. Masud says he is forty-eight. So far has been accused of 'being dangerous,' beaten with a pipe, and kept from sleeping. They made him stand until he finally fell asleep. When he fell to the floor, they beat him again. He tells Khalid that he is Egyptian, and he had traveled to Afghanistan to buy trinkets for his store many times over five years. But, this time on his way back to his shop in Cairo, he went with a friend to Kabul to see the situation first hand. In Kabul, there are bombings every day, and the situation is desperate. They try to leave, but thousands of refugees have the same idea, and then Masud contracts typhoid. His friend looks after him until he can cross to Pakistan, but then the guards at the border question the length of time he spent and the amount of times he's crossed over. His friend is told that he has no visa, and his own passport is outdated because of the length of time he was ill. They tell him the Americans want him and accuse him of being an enemy combatant. In the morning, Masud says, they are taking him to Kandahar for processing. Masud hears the call to



prayer and begins while Khalid mumbles along with no real desire to participate. In fact, if he could change one thing now it would be his religion.

Analysis

Khalid is fed and given tea in the morning again/ After a feeble attempt to gain his freedom, he is kicked by several guards until he vomits. His nose begins to bleed. When they leave him there on the floor, he knows more pain than he's ever known in his life. After sleeping for a time, he wakes with a feeling of complete and utter hopelessness at his situation. There is nothing to live for in his mind, and the world is just a small and horrible place. He is taken to yet another room, cuffed to a chair and given a bottle of water and a slice of warm thin bread which he gulps all at once. He hopes to show them how hungry he is, or perhaps instill a sense of guilt in them for their treatment of him, but once again no one seems to care. He is left alone again, and feels sorry for himself, knowing that for however long he lives, he will never forget this experience. The hardest part is that he does not know or understand what is going on.

Looking around the next morning, he sees that some of the tape covering the window has come undone, and he wonders if maybe he can tell where he is or open the window to get out somehow. He tries to take off the tape further, but using his teeth, it only shreds. He vaguely remembers being let off the chair and cuffed again so that he could sleep on the floor. After being taken to the washroom, he is returned to a room where another man sits on the concrete floor. They introduce themselves to each other, and share their stories of capture and captivity. Masud's story is very different from Khalid's in the beginning. Masud had traveled to Afghanistan from Cairo to buy goods for his store, and then had gone on to Kabul to see the situation with a friend first hand. While there, he contracts typhoid, and by the time he is well enough to travel, his passport has expired. He is accused of being an enemy combatant, and then brought to this facility. Next, they beat him, deprive him of sleep, and finally tell him they are sending him to Kandahar in the morning. Khalid listens to his story, but notes the obvious differences. Khalid had been taken directly from his aunt's home which could only mean that someone had given the authorities his name. When the call to prayer comes, Khalid realizes that he is embarrassed by his religion, and would give anything to change it.

Discussion Question 1

What attempt does Khalid make to free himself? What is the outcome? Should he have tried? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Masud picked up and held? Is he responsible for his current position?



Discussion Question 3

What are the largest differences between the arrests of Khalid and Masud? What does that tell Khalid?

Vocabulary

Molecule, suspicious, irritation, compensate, expectation, combatant, incompetent, resonates.



Chapters 9 and 10

Summary

Chapters 9 and 10

Khalid is awake throughout most of the night, and finally falls asleep. He wakes hours later and cries until the rough bristles on the mat bother him enough that he sits up. The door opens and two guards bring water and a thin slice of bread. After he eats, he is tightly cuffed again, and led out of the house to a waiting car where he sits between two guards. He is driven to an airport and hustled into a cargo plane with lines of other men. He looks for Masud, but doesn't recognize him amongst the other prisoners. He is pushed down the aisle where he is crammed in with the others like a can of sardines. He realizes that he is going to Khandar, and leaving his family behind. He wonders if they'll ever find him.

When they land, they are pulled out one at a time as a soldier welcomes them to Kandahar. His head is covered again and he is taken into a building where along with the others he is kicked into a line. A soldier trips him and he loses consciousness for a moment. His cuffs are cut off and they are all stripped naked. The hood is removed last to reveal they are standing in a hangar of some kind. They are all searched intrusively, photographed from front and side and then roughly shaved bald by a barber with little finesse. Another photo is taken, and the next man in line glances at Khalid with tears in his eyes. One by one they are taken to another building. Khalid's turn comes and in a smaller room he is fingerprinted and his mouth is swabbed. One of the soldiers introduces himself as Anthony and his partner as Sam from the CIA. Sam asks Khalid when he joined al-Qaeda. They seem surprised that he speaks English but still ask when he last saw Osama Bin Laden, and about terrorist cells in England. Finally, calling him a time-waster, they move him along to where he is given a t-shirt and pants. When the next person asks him whether or not he is married or has children, Khalid screams that he is only fifteen. He blacks out when he is thumped from behind and wakes on an earthen floor in a wire cell.

A generator grinds away, and they are warned that talking is prohibited. There is a smell of urine and a bucket in the corner is the only toilet provided. One man begins to pray and soon most of the others join in, but Khalid sits back against the wire, feeling a combination of anger and compassion. Time drags on, and Khalid thinks about his friends and about school. A disgusting lunch is served when the soldiers toss it over the top of the cage, and Khalid eats what he can with his fingers. When that is done, two prisoners are asked to volunteer to empty the buckets. When the man comes into his cage, Khalid tries to talk to him, but the man speaks no English. Feeling lonely and afraid, he covers his head and cries.



Analysis

Khalid spends most of the night thinking about what Masud told him and inspired by the dignity he displays. Having always thought of himself as strong, Khalid now realizes that mostly, his parents had always come to his rescue and now there was no one to help him. He wonders why he didn't fight his father to stay home while they went to Karachi without him. He has no use for Pakistan and is British through and through which makes him wonder now why he wore the shalwar kameez his aunt gave him, realizing that if he hadn't worn it, he might not be where he is now. He pretends he is still in England, seeing his family off at the airport. For a brief moment, he feels better. Guards come again and give him a breakfast of bread and water. Then, he is cuffed again and taken out to a vehicle. Sitting between two guards, he knows there is little chance of escape, and the handcuffs he still wears tells him it is unlikely that they are taking him back to his aunt's home. The atmosphere in the car is clammy and tense. After an hour or so, they get to an airport where lines of men are led up a ramp into a cargo plane. The sound of taking off remind him of the last flight he was on, and panic wells up in him as he realizes that now his family will never find him.

Once they land in Kandahar, they are hooded, then pushed and kicked into a building where the real humiliation begins. They are stripped naked, searched intensively and then shaved bald and his beard is removed – the final insult for most Muslim men. The man in line behind Khalid weeps silently. Their humiliation eats at Khalid. He is questioned again, the stupidity of it grating on him until he yells at the soldier who asks if he is married or has children. He is knocked unconscious and wakes in a small cell. Looking down the line of cells, he hopes to spot a friendly face but recognizes no one. A soldier tells them talking is not allowed, so Khalid is left with his thoughts of friends, home, family and school. He wonders if he will still manage to pass his GCSE's, concerned about his future. To combat his growing fear of failure, he resolves to go to school all summer if necessary to catch up, and picturing his plan gives him a direction and makes him feel better. He imagines himself waiting for a bus and talking to Niamh instead. The vision in his imagination disappears when the food trolley comes and guards throw cardboard boxes over the tops of the cages at them. They are forced to eat with their fingers. Afterward a couple of prisoners are selected to empty the buckets in all the cells. The man who comes into his cell to empty his bucket only speaks Pashtu. Khalid is lonely. He is feeling out of sorts and forgotten; so, he covers his face and cries.

Discussion Question 1

What frightens Khalid most about being taken to Kandahar? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What routine is performed when the prisoners arrive? Which parts are a direct insult to any Muslim man? Why are they insults?



Discussion Question 3

How does Khalid deal with the fact that he is not allowed to talk?

Vocabulary

Impending, intrusive, humiliated, adolescent, vulnerable, resignation, improvises.



Chapters 11 and 12

Summary

Chapters 11 and 12

It takes a while, but soon the man next to him begins greeting him each morning, and he returns the greeting automatically until one day the man surprises him by introducing himself in English. Later, three soldiers arrive with shackles, and Khalid watches as one group of prisoners is taken away. When they return, they are wet and are wearing clean t-shirts. Khalid can hardly believe a shower is in his future. A Red Cross representative arrives with pens, paper and a cup with the Red Cross logo. He is told his number is 256, and Khalid tries to tell him that he is just a child and should be in school. He smiles and tells Khalid that he is an enemy combatant and unfortunately he can do nothing. Khalid realizes the letters probably won't get where they are supposed to either, and isn't sure where to send one anyway. Then Khalid decides to send a letter to Mr. Tagg and perhaps his neighbor, Mac. He has three pieces of paper. Khalid fills the first page in no time, and the airline paper is too thin to write on both sides, so he fills the sides of the page too. He begins to panic when he can't find anywhere to address it, but manages to squeeze it in at the bottom. Finished with the letter to his family, he begins one to Mr. Tagg, but the fact that he is a teacher makes Khalid worry more about grammar and spelling, cramping his style. He decides to finish it later. When the Red Cross man returns, he gives him the letter to his family.

A routine of sorts reveals itself. He is allowed a shower and the opportunity to write letters once a week, and slowly the months grind by. September arrives and there is still no sign that there is a release in his future. Every now and then a prisoner's number is called out, and that person is taken for questioning. Abdul's turn comes and Khalid quietly says good luck. By lunchtime, two hours later, he still hasn't come back. It is night time when he is returned, bent over double with his head hanging on his chest. He is unshackled and the soldiers leave. When Abdul finally looks up, tears are running down his face and Khalid backs off trying to give him some privacy. It takes a long time before he finally whispers to Khalid, telling him that they think he is a spy. A soldier stops outside the cell and something in Abdul snaps. He gets up and rattles the cage screaming 'Death to America'. Wade points his machine gun at Abdul, clearly nervous as other prisoners join in. Finally, Abdul is taken away and soon after the banging and yelling ends too. The next morning Wade introduces Khalid to another soldier named Michael, but all Khalid wants to know is where Abdul is. Wade assures him that he'll be brought back once he has calmed down. The next break in routine comes when Khalid and some of the others are chained together to be taken outside for some sunshine. It is the first time Khalid has seen the sun since his capture six months earlier. He stares at the sky and is stunned when less than five minutes later, they are taken back to their cells. The next day when they offer to take him out again, he refuses. Abdul still hasn't returned, and somehow Khalid knows he never will. This fact is confirmed when a new person is put in the cell next to him. The new man prays incessantly in a whiney and



unpleasant voice. The next day Wade tells him if he doesn't come up with some information soon, his name will be added to those going to Cuba. Wade tells him that Kandahar is just a way station, and Camp Delta is the next stop. He gives Khalid a piece of chewing gum which Khalid relishes despite the new fear he now has. Later, he begins to sing to himself softly in baby like language. He screams baby talk at the next soldiers who come for him that night. They take him to another building and put him in a steel room with a concrete floor. For the next three days, they wake him every half hour.

Analysis

Khalid discovers that the man in the cell next to him speaks English, and soon Abdul Al-Farran is telling him his abduction story. Khalid confesses his worries about missing school so Abdul begins sharing endless 'fun' facts about word origins, and Khalid is soon bored to death. He turns away and Abdul finally stops talking. Later, feeling guilty for insulting Abdul, Khalid tries to explain that he was simply unable to take in so much at one time, but the call to prayer comes and this time Abdul is the one to turn away. One of the soldiers is friendlier than the others, but Khalid soon realizes that his attitude is directly related to his desire to convert his prisoners from Muslim to Christian if he can. When the prisoners are linked by shackles to be taken for a shower, some of the Muslim men are fearful of communal bathing, but Khalid has already participated in school sports which require this, so he eagerly anticipates being clean. Afterward, Khalid is given paper and pen by the Red Cross person, and encouraged to write letters. He writes to his family, and when the guy comes back to collect it, he can envision his Mum crying at the kitchen table, and Gul's arms around her. He still isn't sure the letter will even get to them.

Months roll by. Prisoners are interrogated, and Abdul is taken as well. When he returns, he is a broken man. He is deeply disturbed, having been accused of being a spy, and stealing secrets. When Khalid sees the tears rolling down his face, he backs up to give him his privacy. Later, a soldier comes by and smiles at him. Abdul snaps and starts yelling anti-American slogans. In short order, he is taken away. Wade assures Khalid he will return, but the cell next to him is filled with another man and Khalid knows Abdul is gone. The new man prays incessantly and Khalid longs for someone he can talk to. Wade warns him of a possible transfer to another facility in Cuba and Khalid is stunned that they would take a school aged young man to somewhere like Guantanamo Bay. He worries until three soldiers come to get him in the middle of the night. They transfer him to another building where for the next three days he is woken every half hour.

Discussion Question 1

What is a reservist soldier and what are their responsibilities? What is surprising about their participation?



Discussion Question 2

Where does Wade tell Khalid he may be taken next and why?

Discussion Question 3

What is the next interrogation technique used on Khalid and what effect does it have on him?

Vocabulary

Incessant, dominates, communal, reservist, interrogation, concourse, infinity, incessantly.



Chapters 13 and 14

Summary

Chapters 13 and 14

The lights reveal a small room, the size of a bathroom with only a toilet of steel in one corner and a blue mat. They drag him in and out, with only the drone of the air conditioner in between. This is the third day straight that they've kept him lit up, and he wonders if he'll ever sleep again. As time passes, he loses track of days, hours, all of it.

He tries to sleep, but the guards wake him over and over again. When they come for him, they take him to an interrogation room that is so cold that even the man in the suit is cold. Khalid can just make out the plank in the corner with an old cloth hung over it and the tap coming out of the wall. Khalid can't stop shivering. Then they strip him. A man asks him about the codes he used on the computer, and Khalid tells him they just chat and they were just playing a dumb game with other gamers. Unhappy with the answers Khalid gives him, the man in the suit nods to three guards who lay Khalid on the plank. Shivering, Khalid whimpers, increasingly fearful as the cloth is held down on his face and a pitcher of water is poured over it. He talks to his father in his mind, suffocating, and swallowing rapidly, until finally the water stops. Khalid vomits water, gasping for breath as the man asks him if now he will admit to being involved with al-Qaeda and promises Khalid that if he admits the truth, they will let him go home. Before he can answer, he is tipped back again. His lungs fill. They let him up and he vomits. They tell him this treatment will continue until he admits his part in the bombing plans.

As they lift him just in time to have him vomit and heave until he can breathe again, he tells them he did it. Coughing and hacking, he is dressed by the guards. Shackled and tied down to the floor, Khalid begs to be let go. The man smiles and hands him eight printed pages of 'crimes he has confessed to.' The man tells Khalid to read them, make any changes he wants, and sign them. Khalid asks him why they are already printed, and the man tells him to sign so he can go home. Believing it to be the truth, he signs and then is taken back to his cell. Freezing in the air conditioned cell, he seethes.

Analysis

The light is always on in the room they have taken him to now. Khalid is not allowed to sleep. Every thirty minutes, the guards return to wake him and after three days, Khalid begins to lose track of days and nights, hours, or minutes. It is all a blur.

They show him photographs of the bombing of 9/11 until his mind begins to unravel. When they finally return him to his cell, all he can think about is how much pain he has caused in his life. He remembers every painful betrayal, every half-truth, ever deception. They change tactics and take Khalid to a room that is painfully cold. They strip him and ask him about his time on line, believing he and the other gamers were planning a



bombing campaign. Khalid tries to tell him it is all just a stupid game but they don't believe him. Instead, he is stripped and secured to a board. A cloth is held over his face, and water is poured over him until he comes close to drowning.

Finally, Khalid is broken. He says he did it. He would have said anything to get them to stop. The guards tell him he only lasted ten seconds while the guy before him lasted twenty as they put prison clothes on him again. Khalid asks why the paperwork he is told to sign is already printed. The man will only tell him that if he signs, he can go home. Khalid signs, and they take him back to his cell. Still wet and shivering, the air conditioner is on full and Khalid thinks about the guard's ten second comment. It had felt like a lifetime as he thought about all the people he would want to say goodbye to. Now they have his confession, and Khalid is ashamed to have given in so easily. He curls up into a ball and is filled with hatred for his captors. He goes to sleep.

Discussion Question 1

What tactics do Khalid's captors use to try to get him to confess to terrorist behavior?

Discussion Question 2

What finally breaks Khalid and forces him to confess? Why is this tactic effective when all others have failed?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Khalid ashamed when he is returned to his cell after the water torture? Should he be? Explain.

Vocabulary

Exaggerated, velocity, campaign, suspending, accomplices, intention, confessions, delirium, unrelenting.



Chapters 15 and 16

Summary

Chapters 15 and 16

Khalid finally manages to doze off, still tormented by constant light and the shame of his confession. Then the guards come to get him again. A sandwich with peanut butter is shoved at him and he is told he has half a minute to eat it, but Khalid struggles to swallow even a bit at a time as it sticks to his mouth. Then he is put into an orange suit and chained up. In the time it takes to do this, Khalid falls asleep on his feet. He wakes when the chains are attached to his feet and a hood is placed over his head. Part of him wonders if he is going home despite the whispers of Guantanamo he hears. Earmuffs are shoved over his ears and the world becomes quiet. He feels the ramp of the plane and is shoved on the floor, trying to loosen the earmuffs from his sore ears but they spring back. The interview and confession play a loop in his mind and he wonders if Tariq had anything to do with this. Tariq was the only one who knew his real name, and where he was. He seems to be the link. He manages to move the hood enough to see through a hole that reveals a soldier who is taking pictures of them. He had told his captors everything he could think of, and still they held him. He realizes that the truth doesn't matter. He thinks about his dad. The mess he is in hits him like a brick. Eight months he's been held, tortured, almost drowned and shuffled from place to place. He finally drifts off to sleep.

When they land, a new hell begins. The hood and earmuffs are removed, and he can hear birds and smell the sea. Khalid is thinking about a time in school that makes him smile, and a voice interrupts welcoming them to Guantanamo Bay. Khalid can't understand the heightened security efforts here. He is instructed, once inside a cell, to put his hands and feet in front of the holes that enable his captors to remove his shackles. Even if he could elude the guards and escape the cell, he would still have to climb the fence, get over the barbed wire. From there, all he had to do was swim. His mates would laugh if they could see the absurdity of it. The basic necessities are provided: two blankets, flip flops, towels and wash cloth, shampoo and soap, toothpaste and a bottle of water. There are also two buckets provided this time. Khalid learns the new routine quickly. Breakfast, lunch and dinner - for the most part disgusting and tasteless, making Khalid wonder how anyone can be so inept in the kitchen. In fact, it takes only two days for Khalid to resolve never to eat their bread rolls again. Since Khalid arrived, he has seen no one beyond the person who delivers the food and the soldiers. He listens to the noises of the place, hearing terrified screaming and non-stop coughing coming from somewhere else in the building. The news of Britain joining the war against Iraq with the U.S. is disturbing to most of the prisoners, and creates a near riot, but the soldiers maintain a level of control, standing with machine guns at the ready.



Analysis

Khalid is haunted by the stupidity of his confession. The lights remain bright all night long and Khalid clings to any memory that will drive away the vision of him signing the pages he was given. He thinks about the pages he signed, wishing he'd looked at them a little more closely, perhaps even noticed names on them. He wonders who is responsible. The possibilities are rattling around in his brain. He closes his eyes and imagines he is going home to England and will soon see his Mum and Dad and his sisters. He remembers a lesson Mr. Tagg taught about the Spanish Inquisition and how little sense it had made to him. The general consensus was that with enough torture, a person would say or do anything to make it stop, and Khalid knows now firsthand how true that is. The idea of going to Guantanamo terrifies him.

When they finally land, another group of soldiers takes over, welcoming them to Guantanamo Bay. The atmosphere is serious and all business. Now that he has confessed to his crimes, there is little reason to interact with him. He is a terrorist, and his confession proves it. He pictures the news plastered with his face and the reactions of his friends and teachers. He imagines their disgust in him. He occasionally even hallucinates their presence, seeing Niamh or Nico standing in front of his bed. He wonders if anyone knows where he is. Khalid is stunned when he learns that Tony Blair had sided with the United States in the war against Iraq. The mood among the prisoners is one of near riot and the soldiers stand with machine guns at the ready. Eventually, the noise dies down, and Khalid can once again hear the sounds of someone who is being harmed.

Discussion Question 1

What differences does Khalid notice between the conditions in Kandahar and the conditions in Guantanamo Bay?

Discussion Question 2

What causes the prisoners at Guantanamo to begin a near riot and how do the soldiers respond?

Discussion Question 3

What occupies a great deal of Khalid's thoughts, and why is he so regretful?

Vocabulary

Obscenities, smothering, suspicion, manoeuvres, inquisition, immensely, substantial, pneumatic.



Chapters 17 and 18

Summary

Chapters 17 and 18

Days turn into weeks, which turn into months. The air conditioner quits during the heat of the day, and Khalid's head feels like it is going to explode. He sits up to grab his bottled water. He can hardly put the lid back on after having a sip. The band around his head tightens, and he bangs it against the wall. The pain banishes the pictures in his mind. As the trolley comes down the hall, Khalid replays the pictures of Tariq in his mind, completely unaware that he is biting his own arm until the food arrives and he looks down to see the teeth marks in his arm. He passes time by creating figures out of spots on the wall and counting footsteps in the hall. A guard calls out his number, and he is shackled and taken to another building where he joins other prisoners for shower time. Feeling better by the moment, he opens his eyes to see Masud standing in front of him. At first he refuses to believe what his eyes see in front of him. Masud calls his name, and Khalid finally focuses on him and believes he is real. Masud tells him he was in Morocco where they hung him on a wall, and beat him with a wooden handled strap. His ribs were cracked and one man held a gun to him, telling him his wife was dead. Another man Masud points out Khalid went to Jordan instead and his torture cost him one of his eyes. Then Masud notices the marks on his arm and the bruises on his head. He tells Khalid he must stop hurting himself but Khalid says he is unable to. Masud tells him to ask for a lawyer, and to agree to anything he is accused of. He reminds Khalid that there is no shame in giving in so that they don't hurt him. He also tells him to pray, saying that they will all have to answer to God one day.

One morning, Khalid wakes to loud rap music. It reminds him of days when he sat at Nico's house, singing, talking, and dreaming. The soldiers come for him again, taking him from his daydream to another interrogation room. Seeing Masud has given Khalid strength however, and he is not cowed this time. Instead, he asks for a lawyer and tells them he wants to write to his family. They remind him that they have a document in which he confessed his part in the online plan to bomb a number of cities and Khalid tells them he made it all up in an effort to get his other captors to leave him alone. In a flash, he realizes that is how they got the information on him. They'd simply tortured other captives until they were willing to sign anything as well. When he tells them it won't work, they have him taken back to his cell. They call him frequently over the next few weeks during which Khalid learns to simply turn off his mind and ignore them. One thing he realizes though is that somehow the ongoing interrogations keep him sane. At one point he begins to doubt that he really saw Masud, and yet they continue at him, asking him the name of the fifth accomplice.



Analysis

The days and weeks drag on until they are all just one long blur. Khalid is alone most of the time, and eventually reaches the stage where even a visit from the guards is welcome. His mind becomes a prison of sorts in which he is lost with only memories to keep him company. At times reality is so fleeting that he bangs his head against the wall until the pain brings his mind back to the present. There was even a time where he'd discovered he was biting his own arm, leaving marks. One day when the guards take him to the showers, he sees what he thinks is Masud, but believes he is hallucinating so at first he won't acknowledge him, but Masud keeps talking until he sees his presence is being recognized again. He tells Khalid where he has been and what had been done to him. He warns Khalid to simply tell them anything they want to hear. He tells him there is no shame in talking to save himself. He reminds Khalid that God sees all.

Khalid wakes to rap music one morning, and is reminded of time spent with Nico. Khalid is sorry that he never had the courage to talk to Niamh, or ask her out. He remembers a painting she did called *The Last Buttercup*, and the look on her face as she'd watched him discover it. Having seen Masud helps Khalid, especially when the soldiers come for him again. He manages not to be afraid, and instead tells them how sorry they will be for ignoring his needs, his education, and for keeping him from a lawyer and contact with his family. They try to intimidate him, but their tactics don't work. He simply tunes them out. They insist that he give them the name of the fifth accomplice, implying they already know who four others are. Khalid finally understands that their information comes from others like him who will say or sign anything to get them to stop their torture. The questions keep going until once again he begins to doubt that he saw Masud and begs to be let go.

Discussion Question 1

What encounter does Khalid believe is in his imagination at first and how does Khalid deal with it?

Discussion Question 2

How does this encounter alter Khalid's behavior in upcoming interrogations? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What realization does Khalid come to during one of his many interrogations?

Vocabulary

Rectify, ominously, disinfectant, communal, consumed, suspended, hysterical.



Chapters 19 and 20

Summary

Chapters 19 and 20

Khalid hears the sounds of Ramadan. He hears men refusing food despite their hunger, praying. Khalid is too weak to care or join in. Khalid is struggling with genies which have begun calling his name. It started about the same time as he saw Masud again. He gets up and paces to remind his body to function. He becomes aware that he's stopped in the middle of the floor, afraid that he is truly losing his mind. When a white space grows to envelope everything around him, he wets himself in fear. A black guard comes and comments on the stench of urine, asking Khalid why he hasn't eaten. He tells Khalid he has to eat and says he'll be back in ten minutes for his tray. Khalid dutifully eats, unable to think of what might happen if he doesn't, but ten minutes pass and the guard doesn't return. He continues to stand there, tray in hand, unable to go back to the white space by his bed. He bursts into tears when he realizes that he hasn't heard them call his number for some time, and worries that they've given it to someone else. Finally another guard comes for the tray, and disgustedly tells him he's stinking up the place. When he leaves, Khalid goes back to his bed and gives himself over to the jinn. Shafi comes to clean the cell and for a time Khalid has normal conversation and feels normal. The feeling lasts for a while after Shafi leaves, the smell of disinfectant overwhelming his other senses. His thoughts turn to rainbows and as he imagines one, he turns and sees Niamh again. Just as she smiles at him, the smell of urine invades and he has to face the fact that she is not there. He curls up on the bed like a baby, pulling a towel over his head to keep the jinn away.

Six days of shouting at the silences passes when things change again. Will, the library man comes by and asks if he wants any books. Three small books are pushed through the slot and Will walks to the next cell. For the next few days, Khalid reads the three stories in each condensed Reader's Digest books again and again. The characters become his friends, and prisoner and guards alike breathe a sigh of relief to hear sounds of normalcy coming from Khalid's cell. One day without warning the guards take him to the showers and then let him out into a fenced enclosure unshackled. It is the first time in the year that he has been in Guantanamo that he has been allowed out. Two minutes pass and then two other men are brought in to join him. At first he is annoyed by the intrusion, but one of them speaks English and they start talking. Ali Abaza is from Ghana and the other man, Balendra Varshab is from Bengal. Ali is a twenty seven year old lawyer who traveled both the West and in the Middle East, and was accused of helping fundamentalists work on dirty bombs. Ali talks about religion and Khalid suddenly hopes they won't be interrupted. After a few minutes of conversation, Khalid realizes how little he knows and wonders where his brain has been. He argues with himself for a while and then goes back to the books which have a safe beginning, middle and end.



Analysis

Khalid is plagued by things his mind conjures. The jinn come for him in the silences and take him to other worldly places where nothing is as it seems and they have all the power. Then, just as abruptly, he finds himself back on his bed, listening to someone screaming and finding himself wanting to join in. He wonders how guards can behave the way they do with their prisoners, kicking and hitting them for being different from them, and then just going home to their families like anyone else with a normal job. How can they be the good guys, Khalid wonders, and how can they say they are on the side of peace? Khalid is slowly losing his mind. Too much time alone allows for his imagination to run wild and too much of that allows for psychosis to begin. He imagines himself taken by jinn to their world and at their mercy, fear causing him to void his bladder. The smell is enough to bring him back to reality for a time, and the guards complain as they give or take trays of food. He returns to his mind for brief periods of time, and wonders how it all went so horribly wrong. He can hear a man screaming, and feels like he should join in. For a time, he yells at the gate, and then dinner is served. Later, the volunteer prisoners come to clean the cells, and Khalid talks to Shafi who warns him against starving himself to death as others have already done. When he leaves, the cell smells of disinfectant for a time and keeps Khalid grounded. Then slowly the smell of urine returns.

When Will first asks Khalid if he wants books, Khalid says yes, but he doesn't believe he will actually get them. He opens the first one, smelling the pages and running his fingers over the covers. For a time, they are play things. He lines them up on his pillow, uses them as a footstool, and even balances them on his head as he walks. He also reads them over and over, learning the characters until they become his friends and he has conversations with them. The relief around him is palpable with prisoners and guards alike that sounds of normalcy are coming from his cell. His next surprise comes after a regular shower session. Instead of being taken back to his cell, he is taken to an outside pen and unshackled. Before he can get used to his new found freedom, two other prisoners are brought in as well. One of the others also speaks English, and his short conversation takes Khalid from insanity to sanity in a single session. Ali Abaza is a lawyer who worked and lived in Saudi Arabia. He is intelligent and well-read and spoken, and his conversation with Khalid opens his eyes. When they are taken back to their cells, Khalid is standing straighter, and contemplating the history of Islam and religion, wondering where his brain has been for years.

Discussion Question 1

What causes Khalid to wet himself? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What two surprises happen to Khalid? What are their effects on him?



Discussion Question 3

Whom does Khalid meet that takes him from insanity to sanity in a single session? What inspires him?

Vocabulary

Unfathomable, desperation, monotony, insurgents, extremists, inspiration, spectrum, implicated.



Chapters 21 and 22

Summary

Chapters 21 and 22

Will comes with two more Reader's Digest books and a National Geographic magazine. By the next day, he has read them cover to cover and is eager for more. He asks a guard if he can swap with someone else, and she tells him she'll see what she can do, but her sarcasm is lost on Khalid. Instead, it becomes something else he waits for during the day other than the barber's head shaving which should have come a week ago. Breakfast arrives but Khalid is worked up about the prospect of barbers and books. Lunch comes and goes before his number is called. He gets in the line-up for the barber getting a glimpse of Ali in line as well. Dinner comes but still no books. The air conditioner runs without ceasing, freezing Khalid's freshly shaved head and chilling him to the core.

Khalid begins to keep track of the changing days on the wall by scratching lines; but, he doesn't know the current date. So, he has little to go by. He decides to ask a guard what the date is and practices how he will do so before the next guard comes. When the tray is pushed in, he asks but the guard ignores him. Now it becomes a mantra he is unable to stop without an answer. Finally, another prisoner calls him a dorkhead and tells him it is the day after yesterday. The name stops him cold. Only one person in the world ever called him a dorkhead. He calls Tariq by name and yells that he is the dorkhead. A soldier tells him it is January 1st, 2004, and tells him to be quiet. Khalid whispers at the fence, calling to Tariq. When no answer comes, he yells out Tariq's name and a woman tells him gently to cut it out. He punches the wall, making his knuckles swell and turns when the voice tells him not to make things worse than they already are. He turns and she introduces herself as Lee-Andy and comes from somewhere near the North Carolina line. She offers him chocolate and promises to ask the name of the man in the cell next to him. After she leaves, he eats half of the small chocolate bar before he manages to stop himself. The next morning Tariq tries to talk to Khalid. He asks him if it's really him and tells him that all of the gamers were picked up. He says he bribed a guard with his watch to learn that it was the Australian who sunk them. After being tortured, he told them that they had plotted to blow up the White House and the Houses of Parliament. Khalid had already convinced himself that it was Tariq who had given them all up, and he doesn't believe him now. As they argue the point, guards come to get Khalid again, this time taking him to a room with nothing but a speaker that blares rock music so loud that his ears hurt. He slowly climbs backward into himself and into the land of the jinn again.



Analysis

Khalid goes through his allotted books in a single day, and asks the guard for more. She agrees to see if he can exchange with someone else, but Khalid doesn't notice the sarcasm in her voice, so it remains something hopeful for later in the day. Khalid survives by tracking the schedules of everything from meals to guard changes to floor washes, and is amazed when they come to get him after lunch and he sees the floor has been cleaned. He wonders how he missed that, and resolves to pay more attention. He sees Ali in line and they wordlessly communicate for a moment before Khalid is pushed ahead. He sits for his shave and the barber slices into his eyebrow. Khalid can only tense and grit his teeth as the first drop of blood drips down his face. He catches sight of himself in a reflection and hardly recognizes the eyes that look back. Later, in his cell again, he faces the fact that no new books will be coming, and resentful, he tries not to dwell on it for fear of where it will lead.

Little things make up the whole of Khalid's day, and as such, each little thing carries a weight of importance all its own. This is the case when Khalid begins to keep track of the days, making a mark on the wall as each one passes, but with no beginning reference point, he has no idea what the date is which makes keeping track almost a total waste of time. He resolves to ask the guards when they come with breakfast, but so much time by himself is causing his social skills to falter, and nervously he is reduced to practicing how he intends to ask even the simple question of what the date is. When he finally does ask, and the guard ignores him, Khalid loses his composure, and begins yelling. Finally, one of the guards tells him it is January 1st and asks him to settle down, which of course he does. The date is not the only thing on Khalid's mind. He is still thinking about the cell next to him, wondering if Tariq is really there. He yells out not to call him a dorkhead again, but the only response is from the soldier, warning him again to be quiet. Khalid begins to whisper at the fence instead, calling out Tariq's name. When he won't answer, he yells out his name and this time a woman's voice tells him gently to cut it out. For a moment, he confuses her with Niamh, but then he realizes that is about as likely as it is that Tariq is next door to him. He begins to hit the wall in an attempt to give his fury somewhere to go, but that sweet voice talks to him again and everything in him bends to listen. A female guard, new to the post, comes to his cell, introducing herself and offering him chocolate. She even opens it for him when she sees his hands after hitting the wall. He asks her if she can find out the name of his neighbor, and she agrees to if he stops yelling and hurting himself. Then she leaves, and Khalid is left in a state of wonder, eating chocolate and wondering how he could ever have taken such a pleasure for granted. The next morning, Tariq talks to him, and tells him that all the gamers were picked up, but Khalid has spent so much time believing that Tariq was responsible for his capture that he can't let it go. He can't quite get it through his head that the Australian player was the one who gave them all up, telling his captors that they'd been planning to bomb key American targets including the White House. Then, before the argument is resolved, soldiers come for Khalid again. This time they take him to a room where only a speaker exists. Loud rock and roll is enough to make his ears cringe and he sinks into himself again, finding that place in his mind where the jinn live.



Discussion Question 1

What things does Khalid do in order to mark time in his cell? Why are they important?

Discussion Question 2

What is so special about the interaction between Lee-Andy and Khalid and how does it impact him?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Khalid so upset with Tariq and why is he unable to enjoy the fact that his cousin is beside him and he now has someone to commiserate with?

Vocabulary

Detainees, recognition, vengeance, mantra, appreciation, irritating, contempt.



Chapters 23 and 24

Summary

Chapters 23 and 24

Khalid's left ear is badly damaged from the relentless music in the isolation room, causing him so much pain that he is unable to sit up to eat. Lee-Andy had given him aspirin when he returned and confirmed that Tariq was in the cell next door to him. When Lee-Andy finally returns, she makes a miracle happen. Two guards come back and without shackles take him outside and into a building he has not been in before. The hospital has others in it, and Khalid sits groaning until a doctor checks him out, telling him that putting his fingers in his ears gave him an infection and armed with antibiotics, sends him back to his cell. He is given his pills and a painkiller making the pain almost bearable. He begins to question why Lee-Andy's presence and her intervention on his behalf, and wonders whether she is a spy, sent to gain his trust. He resolves to tell Tariq when he gets the chance. Now he is leery of her, and when she shows up with morning medications, he can't even return her smile. She leans on the wall to be social, and Khalid panics so she leaves, apologizing to him. Then she stands guard for Khalid and Tariq so that they can talk for a while. Tariq tells Khalid that he lied about everyone in an attempt to stop the torture, even telling them that Khalid's father was a fund raiser for extremists, and asks Khalid to forgive him. Khalid is angry, but as Tariq continues to talk to him, he realizes that the anger is misplaced. If nothing else, just having Tariq in the cell next to him has changed him. He is finding it easier to cope, and he is learning a great deal from just listening to his cousin. Lee-Andy stops by to say goodbye. For reasons she doesn't understand, she is being rotated out again. Khalid is sorry to see her go, but glad that some of his humanity is returning.

Marvin comes to get Khalid one day, and in serious manner escorts him to an interrogation room of sorts. A man who looks similar to Khalid's teachers comes in and tells Khalid that he is his lawyer. Khalid is stunned, and even more so when he is given a letter with his father's handwriting on it. Inside, his father tells him that he searched for her, and wouldn't leave Pakistan until he knew what happened. Harry fills him in on many of the current events he is unaware of, and the rights he is entitled to. He promises Khalid that one day this will all be over and he will return to his life. When their time together is over, Harry promises to return the next day to take his statement, and then Khalid is taken back to his cell. He ignores his dinner and the whispers from Tariq as he sits down to read his father's letter. In it he learns about his father's mugging and his search for Khalid and reads about how hard they are working to get him released. Finally, he tells Tariq who asks if Harry can help him as well. Khalid promises to ask Harry to help him also. The next day he is taken to see Harry early. He tells him what has happened since he was taken and how his torture led to a confession. He promises to get Khalid more books and perhaps even a teacher. When he is taken back to his cell, Tariq asks if Khalid mentioned him and embarrassed, he admits he forgot again, but promises he will.



Analysis

Over the next few days, Khalid hears Tariq calling his name but his ear throbs, and the pain will allow him to do little beyond lay on his bed in agony. Lee-Andy gave him aspirin the day before, and confirmed Tariq was in the cell next to him. The guard doesn't care when Khalid doesn't get up for his dinner tray, and Lee-Andy hasn't returned with aspirin which is all Khalid can think about. He knows that yelling will only get him put back in isolation, so he tries to quietly endure, ignoring repeated efforts to talk from Tariq. When she finally returns, she takes one look at Khalid and in moments has him taken to the hospital where he is examined and given antibiotics and painkillers. He is surprised to find they even have a hospital, and deeply affected by the sight of one of the men there, yellow tubes going into his nose making gasping noises. Another has wounds that remind him of leprosy and still another has a pallor that is deathly. Though grateful for the doctor, he still worries that they'll forget to give him the next dose of drugs and pain relief. Tariq continues to call out to him, but Khalid ignores him, thinking instead of the hospital and what he'd seen there. He begins to wonder about Lee-Andy's presence and comes to the conclusion that she might be a spy and decides that he will warn Tariq. When she comes the next day, he is unable to interact with her in the same friendly manner, afraid of her now. She leans on the wall beside him just to be social and he reveals his fear, embarrassing her and causing her to apologize as she leaves. She comes back a while later, allowing Tariq and Khalid to talk while she stands there, and Khalid learns about Tariq's capture and interrogation. When Tariq admits to having lied about other people including Khalid's father to stop them from torturing him further, Khalid is livid. His voice gets louder and Lee-Andy has to tell them to settle down. She sees Khalid's rage and warns him not to let it take hold. She teaches him to snap his fingers in front of his eyes to interrupt the thoughts, and Khalid is surprised when it works. When she returns it is to tell him goodbye and Khalid has no way to put into words how grateful he is for her kindnesses. Marvin comes to take Tariq to the showers and pressed up against the fence, Khalid sees him for the first time. His eyes are warm and friendly, reminding him that they are family, and that even angry with him, Khalid has felt a burden lift since knowing he is next to him.

The next day, Marvin comes for Khalid and his demeanor is serious. He takes Khalid to a room and sits him in a chair. A minute later a man comes in and sitting down he introduces himself as his lawyer. Harry Peterson is warm and friendly, and is apologetic for how long it has taken to get in to Khalid. He gives him a letter from his father, and he is barely able to contain his emotions. He tells Khalid that his family loves and misses him, and fills him in on the current events of the world, at the same time explaining the complexities involved in getting in to see him and ensuring that his rights were being observed. Harry asks him if he's okay, and Khalid tells him not really. When the guard returns to signify their time is up, Harry is clearly emotional, although he does his best to hide it from Khalid. He promises to return the next day in order to take a formal statement from him, and guarantees that he will be able to include everything he wants in it. When Khalid gets back to his cell, he wants only to be left alone so that he can process everything and read his father's letter. In it, his father explains his disappearance, and the aftermath of Khalid's capture. Some of the letter is blacked out,



edited by authorities, and Khalid is angry that anyone would defile his father's letter to him. Khalid had never understood how much his father meant to him until his disappearance. Now that he knows his father is alive and well, he knows deep in his heart that he will never be embarrassed by his father's old fashioned ways again, or wishfully compare him to his friend's fathers and find him lacking in any way. Nothing matters beyond that his entire family is okay. Tariq is still whispering through the mesh, trying to get his attention, and finally Khalid feels able to discuss the events. He tells Tariq about Harry and the letter from his father, and promises to ask for help for Tariq from Harry as well when he sees him the following day. He can barely sleep from excitement, and soon after breakfast the next morning, true to his word, Harry returns. This time, Khalid manages to ask a few questions of his own, the top on his list being his family's health and then his own and when he can go home. Harry doesn't have all the answers yet, telling him that his confession is working against him. They talk again of his rights, and Khalid asks for more books, course studies, and some sweets if it can be arranged. The one thing he forgets once again is to mention his cousin Tariq. Later, back in his cell when Tariq is questioning him about his lawyer's visit, Khalid is ashamed to admit that he hadn't mentioned Tariq but swears on his mother's life that he will the next time without fail.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Khalid's opinion of Lee-Andy change and in what way?

Discussion Question 2

What does Khalid learn about his capture from Tariq and what prompts him to forgive his cousin for the lies told during his interrogations?

Discussion Question 3

What does Khalid learn from his lawyer, Harry, and how is Khalid affected by his visit and the information he brings?

Vocabulary

Leprosy, pallor, intervention, rampaging, suffocating, extremists, compliant, confiscated.



Chapters 25 and 26

Summary

Chapters 25 and 26

Ten days have passed since Harry's visit to Khalid, and he still hasn't returned. Khalid did receive a postcard from Rochdale from his mother and father. Nothing comes for Tariq however, but Tariq is convinced that his parents will talk to Khalid's parents and will assume that Tariq is in the same place. Khalid is beginning to learn Arabic from Tariq, and he has also begun praying. Khalid is surprised when two guards come to move him to another block. Though he refuses at first, he isn't given a choice. He grabs his things and tells Tariq who has already heard the news. Then he dresses in the orange suit he was provided, and they put a hood over him. The shackles go on, and he hears Tariq telling him not to worry. He is loaded into a van and driven for a short time before the hood is removed and he is led to a region where wire cages are filled with men. Everyone is talking at once, and he is greeted by shouts of Salaam. It is clear that Harry likely asked for Khalid to be moved, not realizing that Khalid would be more alone here as the others are all older and don't speak English. The next morning, he is interrogated again. The guards try to chat with him first, acting friendly, but then the same questions begin. Khalid tells them he won't speak to them without his lawyer present; calling them liars and telling them he intends to sue them once he is finally released. Then he whistles as though he is unconcerned, making their questioning impossible. Finally, they take him back to his new cage. They try to interrogate him several times over the next few days, but get nowhere. He whistles and taps his feet to every tune he can think of. Back in his cage, he writes to Mr. Tagg and as the hours drag on, he begins to wonder if he'll ever get out.

One morning a large guard comes and tells him to get his things together. When he gets out of the cage, he realizes that he hasn't been shackled and the guard only smiles when he says so. He nods at others who say goodbye in various languages as he passes, and he is taken to a block nearby where he is put in a small room. It is hot and sticky, and he is left without water, but when he bangs on the door, a female guard hands him a bottle and apologizes for not having given it to him earlier. Khalid is shocked by the simple courtesy. It is after midnight when they finally come for him, and he is weak with heat and hunger. He is escorted to another room just down the hall where Majors Donaldson and Leeth tell him that he's going home and is no longer considered a threat. Khalid is given jeans that are too large and a baggy t-shirt, but he almost loses his composure when a guard returns with shackles and a hood again, telling Khalid it is just for a short while. They take him from a car to a boat, and when he gets back to land again, the shackles and hood are removed. A soldier hands him his bag of meager belongings, and Khalid gets on board, surprised to find Harry and several others on board as well. He tears up, hardly able to speak, and gives Khalid a bottle of water, along with crackers and cheese. He slowly enjoys every mouthful. Harry has another surprise. He finds three cards in his briefcase wishes him a Happy Birthday



for the one he'd missed three weeks earlier both from himself and his family. He reads their current news, and tells Harry about Tariq. When he's done, he is exhausted. Harry assures him that with his testimony, it will be easier to help Tariq. Then, seeing how exhausted Khalid is, he suggests they leave the rest until later. Khalid asks to go to the loo, and Harry tells him that isn't necessary. He is disappointed that there is no mirror in which to see himself.

Analysis

Khalid gets increasingly anxious when ten days pass and there is still no return visit from Harry. He is more and more ashamed for having forgotten to mention Tariq on two separate occasions and Tariq hasn't hounded him about it once. Although Khalid had given up writing letters before, after Harry's visit, he begins again, writing to everyone he can think of, although he still has no idea whether or not they will be posted. Khalid discovers that through prayer he is comforted – an idea that never occurred to him before when he just thought that prayer was uncool. The prayer times are always followed by silence from prisoners and guards as well. When the guards come to move Khalid, he refuses at first, but it is clear that he will not be given a choice. As they take him away, he yells that he won't forget Tariq, devastated by the realization that he has no idea if they will see each other any time soon. When they get to their destination a short van ride away and take off Khalid's hood, his face is a mixture of tears and sweat. Though his new accommodations are open to the sky and sunshine, it is little compensation for the loss of his cousin's company. The general atmosphere is more relaxed here, but Khalid can't stop kicking himself for not mentioning Tariq to Harry and the comfort of his presence in this place. The constant din soon gets on his nerves and he wishes he could return to his old cell. They try to interrogate him several times over the next few days. Khalid refuses to talk to them, announcing that he won't talk without his attorney, feeling a confidence he hasn't felt since he was taken, but as the days go by, he begins to wonder if he will have to pay a price for his lack of cooperation. He also begins to lose faith that he will be released at all. As darkness comes again, he thinks about his sister and the frogs she'd brought to show him, remembering her crying when he brushed her off and now the memory breaks his heart.

When a guard comes early one morning to take Khalid from his cell, for the first time he isn't shackled. He tells the guard he's forgotten, who only smiles at Khalid. Since he has been shackled for the better part of two years whenever he walks anywhere, he now walks pigeon-toed. He manages to walk without falling, following the guard to a building where he is put in a room alone. Other than a female soldier giving him water, he is left alone until nightfall. Then he is taken down the hall to another room where two Majors inform him that he is going to be set free, no longer thought of as a threat. Khalid is angry at first. Khalid can hardly believe what he's hearing and berates them, telling them that he is not the threat, they are. He tells them they should apologize for kidnapping him, and torturing him, but after his outburst they are less inclined to honor his request to say goodbye to Tariq. One guard tells him everything will be okay and he asks him to find number 372 and tell him that he has been released. The guard says he will. He is given street clothes that don't fit, but the smell of denim brings back memories



of home, and Khalid resolves to be more helpful at home; get up early to shine his father's shoes; walk his sisters to school without complaint; and promise his father that he will look after him when he is rich. He loses his confidence when a soldier returns with shackles but he promises it is only for a little while. Finally, they leave the compound he feels like he has been in for thirty years. Khalid is taken from vehicle to boat to land again where the shackles are finally removed before he boards the plane to return to England. Harry greets him enthusiastically, and helps him settle in. He gives him cards from his family, a newspaper from home, and fills him in on the community's efforts to free him. Khalid tells him about Tariq, and Harry assures him that his testimony will be helpful in getting him released. The transition to the idea of freedom is slow, and Khalid still isn't sure he can use the bathroom without consent from someone, but Harry is encouraging. Khalid wishes there was a mirror so that he could see himself. He thinks about Guantanamo and asks Harry if they'll ever shut the place down. Harry tells him that the biggest issue is deciding what to do with the men who are there, many of which have no home to go to. Khalid is very grateful all of a sudden, knowing he has all that he needs.

Discussion Question 1

What is left out of the postcard that Khalid's mother and father send him? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Khalid so upset that he is being moved to another section?

Discussion Question 3

What did Khalid neglect to do that he is now regretful for and why?

Vocabulary

Descends, compensation, distractions, dominates, perimeter, psychological, conflicting.



Chapters 27 and 28

Summary

Chapters 27 and 28

Khalid wakes after a period of sleep as a trolley with food is wheeled down the aisle. Harry tells him that he will first be landing at RAF Northolt first for exit interviews and reintegration help but assures him it won't be for long. When they land, a plain clothed police man enters the plane and arrests Khalid under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and he is loaded into a black van which has been driven right into the plane. Ashwin, the other prisoner who was from Birmingham and flew home on the same plane is taken to the van as well, and they are both brought into a long grey building and shown to their own rooms. He enjoys a long, hot shower, after carefully critiquing himself in the first mirror he has seen in two years, and gets into clean clothes. Harry knocks on the door and gives a phone to Khalid when he opens it, telling him his father is on the line. Khalid sits on the bed, and revels in the soft and gentle voice that is his fathers. He is then interviewed again, the answers carefully recorded as he is asked many of the same questions again. The next morning he meets with Professor Wolfson. The Professor talks to him about the possible challenges he faces going home, and explains that he may react differently, even fearfully of normal things for a time, but cautions him to remember that all of this is quite normal. Khalid is still thinking about this when he is taken out to a large exercise yard. It takes him a while to walk around the edges, his hands in his pockets, and he marches around at first. Then he runs and jumps, chasing an imaginary ball, excited at the whole prospect of finally going home.

Harry drives Khalid home and traffic is much louder than he remembers it. When the car reaches his home, Khalid is surprised by the orange and yellow flowers growing in Mac's yard next door. The whole family embraces him as he comes up the path, his sisters much taller than he remembers them, and his mother weeping. His father stands back, proudly watching and the neighbors watch it all from their windows. They have tea and cake and Harry returns his Guantanamo possessions and for a moment he is right back there again, but his father calls him and the ache recedes again. They walk Harry to his car and say goodbye. Khalid goes up to his room. It looks exactly as he left it. The next afternoon, he makes his first attempt to go and see his mates. He heads towards Nico's house but finds himself unable to cross the busy street. He can hardly breathe and feels faint until Holgy pulls him back, taller than Khalid now and grinning wildly. They talk, and he tells Khalid his name is Eshan now, having dropped the young nickname, and that he is in sixth-form College, suggesting Khalid scope it out as well. They cross the road together and Eshan fills him in on the news. Mikael is in Australia now and Tony Banda began his apprenticeship with British Gas and is still going out with Lexy. Eshan leaves him at Nico's house, and when he finally knocks, there is no one home. When he gets home, Mr. Tagg is waiting there and welcomes him home. He takes out the letter Khalid sent him, and they talk about sixth-form college exams. He promises to help and asks Khalid for a favor in return. He wants Khalid to help him with



an assembly and Khalid agrees. It takes two days before he runs into Nico, who admits that his mother told him to stay away until Khalid was ready. Khalid tells him his is about to help with the assembly, and Nico teases him that they tend to go on for hours, and teasing, asks if he has to.

Analysis

Khalid sleeps and then wakes and eats a meal of baked beans, a curly omelet and a roll with butter, considering it the best meal he's ever eaten. It's gone so quickly that Harry gives him his meal as well, saying he isn't really hungry. Though Khalid will still be kept for a few days to do exit interviews, Harry assures him that this time he'll have a comfortable room that includes a bathroom. When the plane lands, Khalid and the other prisoner from Birmingham, Ashwin, are loaded into a van and taken to another facility. They are shown to their rooms and Khalid never sees Ashwin again, but the room he is taken to is larger than his parent's living room, and has a real single bed, a pile of clothes, newspapers, crisps, water and a new Qur'an. The police man suggests he takes a shower and offers him a hot drink. Khalid asks for hot chocolate and goes into the bathroom after he leaves. Harry comes after Khalid showers and gives him a phone with his father on the line. He talks to all of the family, his parents both crying on the phone. Afterward, he is questioned again but this time, they ask about his abduction and the whole experience is more like a chat than an interrogation. He talks to his family several times, listening as they do most of the talking, telling him about all of the groups that got involved in getting him released. He meets with Professor Wolfson who is frank about the difficulties that Khalid may experience when he returns home. He warns him that he may shy away from crowds, noise, hugs and physical contact and tells him that all of this is very normal. Khalid can understand the hurdles in front of him and is still thinking about it when they lead him out to the exercise area. The area is large enough to walk and run around in, and kicking an imaginary ball, he allows himself to get excited about going home for the first time.

Harry drives him home and Khalid realizes that he might not recognize his mates and wonders if they think he is guilty or if they will talk behind his back after pretending everything is normal to his face. His stomach clenches at the thought. His own house hasn't changed. Harry follows Khalid inside and everyone clamors for his attention until he feels smothered. His father takes him into the kitchen, telling the others to let him be for a moment. Khalid turns and takes his father's face in his hands, kissing him on the nose – a gesture never done before, and his father laughs. After tea and cake, they walk Harry to his car. Back inside, Khalid looks at the heap of mail, amazed and is going to open a card when he hears his name on the television. All of a sudden, he is overwhelmed and climbs over the back of the couch to get away. His father tells the family to let him go, noting that he is tired, and agreeing, Khalid goes upstairs. He sits on his bed, thinking of the 600 men still in Guantanamo, and thinks of the kitchen full of food. Well-wishers begin to arrive, and the parade of people seems endless. Finally Khalid begs for respite, and lets his father handle them at the door. He has trouble sleeping and still hasn't worked up the courage to go and see his mates. It takes another two days before he ventures downstairs at night, and he fires up the computer



to see hundreds of messages. Some of the messages are not so pleasant, and one triggers the memory of being at his Aunt's house as the soldiers entered to take him away. He yells 'NO' falling out of his chair and then suddenly he hears his father's voice and feels his arms around him. He cries with Khalid. After he calms down, they talk and talk about everything until dawn breaks. When Khalid finally works up the courage to go and see his friends, he walks through the park, noticing the changes since he was there last. A couple of kids he half recognizes comment as he passes, but Khalid doesn't stop. He gets to the busy intersection and freezes, the noise and traffic more than he can handle, and he stands there, sweating and feeling faint until a familiar voice calls out his name. Excited, Holgy, now Eshan he tells Khalid, pulls him back from the road and fills him in on some of the things he's missed. He's taller now than Khalid, and even has hair on his face. He takes Khalid the rest of the way to Nico's house, and leaves him there, telling him how good it is to see him and how glad he is that he is back. Nico isn't home, so Khalid goes back home himself and Mr. Tagg is there waiting for him. They talk about college and he agrees to help Khalid get in. He asks for Khalid's help as well, and Khalid agrees to address the assembly with him. He finally sees Nico at the school who tries to pick him up but fails as Khalid is taller than he used to be as well. They joke about Khalid's addressing the assembly, both grinning.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Khalid unable to go home when the plane lands in England?

Discussion Question 2

What hurdles does Professor Wolfson tell Khalid he may face when he returns and why?

Discussion Question 3

What are some of the difficulties that Khalid does encounter when he returns?

Vocabulary

Luxuriating, vaguely, descends, detachment, remoteness, disentangling, assembly.



Chapters 29 and 30

Summary

Chapters 29 and 30

Mr. Tagg introduces Khalid and he walks to the microphone with the letter he wrote to Mr. Tagg in his hand. It takes a moment to summon his courage, and a gentle word from Mr. Tagg. Then he begins and the assembly hangs on every word, shocked, horrified, and surprised. As soon as he finishes, the auditorium erupts with clapping and cheering. He sits down again, shaking. Slowly, Khalid's life returns to some semblance of normalcy. His attitude has changed, and he now walks shyly dignified instead of confidently entitled. He is standing in line at a newsagents waiting to buy chocolate when a voice calls his name behind him. Niamh has cut her hair short, and Khalid realizes that he remembered her face quite differently. He gets lost in memories again and Niamh takes his arm and walks him away, talking non-stop about nothing important. Niamh sees the look on his face, and sits him on a bench beside her. He finally manages to admit that he's always liked her, and she returns the sentiment, insisting if she weren't seeing someone else, she'd be so 'into him'. Struggling, he makes excuses and ducks into a sports store. Inside, he is shaking so hard he can't even snap his fingers like Lee-Andy taught him, and is having trouble breathing. Two friends from primary school see him through the window and come in. Nadim bends down and takes Khalid's hands gently from his face, calling his name, and is stunned by the fear he sees there. Khalid doesn't answer when they tell him they'll take him home, hardly able to walk.

Khalid sits at the kitchen table writing a letter to Tariq while his mother cooks and Gul sits coloring a picture at the table across from him. After exhausting all of the current news he can think of, he asks Gul if she will let him include her picture in Tariq's letter, but she refuses. He tells Tariq about the reactions of people, good and bad, and admits that he sometimes wonders if things will ever feel normal again. Falling crayons bring back memories of clacking food trays, and in a blink he is there again, waiting for one endless day to pass on to another. His mother says she can't help wondering how large a part Tariq played in all of it, and Khalid immediately defends him, asking his mother not to make the same mistakes he did when she has no way of understanding the situation. Feeling guilty, she turns away, admitting that she feels bad for Tariq but can't forgive the things he said about Khalid's father. He writes a bit more and hears his father come in the door. Khalid asks if he's seen the poster advertising the upcoming rug sale, and tells him they are going. In that moment, there is nowhere Khalid would rather be. He sees his father's new shoes and asks him for them, settling on the floor to polish them the way his father normally would. His father watches with approval, and Khalid is overjoyed, filled with the love of his family.



Analysis

Khalid is sweating nervously as he approaches the microphone at the assembly, and it takes him a moment to summon the courage to begin speaking. When he reads the first line, the crowd laughs and in the confidence the moment brings, he continues. The kids hang on every word as Khalid reads the letter which describes the torture and mistreatment he and his cousin Tariq faced at the hands of their captors. When he is finished, he sits back down to cheers and applause, but he knows that words aren't enough. They chant 'close down Guantanamo' as Mr. Tagg tries to regain control. Over the next while, Khalid slowly begins to get used to what is normal again. He revels in ordinary pleasures – the smell of food cooking, and a full fridge; taps filled with water accessible whenever he wants it; unending showers; and shops with lottery tickets and chocolate. He stares at a Laundromat that used to be Nasir's shop and wonder where he is. A woman comes out and tells him that someone had pushed a petrol bomb through Nasir's letter box and soon after, although no one was hurt, he'd returned to Pakistan. The information saddens Khalid as he remembers Nasir's kind voice and actions. He runs in Niamh, who is hardly anything like he remembered her, and when he struggles to have a normal conversation with her, she walks him to a bench and sits him down, asking him if he's alright. He manages to tell her that he's always liked her, and she returns the sentiment but adds that she is seeing someone. Khalid can't believe it, and can hardly excuse himself fast enough. He goes into the sports store where he completely melts down, shaking so hard that he can hardly stand. Two friends from grade school look in the window and see him there. They come in, and tell the shop owners they'll look after him. Gently, Nadim takes Khalid's hands from his face, stunned by the fear and darting eyes he sees there. They tell him they'll take him home, but Khalid is in such distress he can't answer. He can hardly walk with them.

Khalid writes to Tariq, trying to give him the latest news and fill him in on all that's happened since he got home. He tells him about the assembly and the reactions of the students, and about the local news. He tells him that Mac is going to teach him to drive, and even tries to include a picture from Gul, but she won't let him send it. His mother still blames Tariq although she feels sorry for him too, but she can't forgive the things he said about Khalid's father. Khalid tries to correct her, gently reminding her that she can't possibly understand the situation he was in, and suggests she don't judge him unless she does. She turns away, feeling guilty. Khalid's father comes home, and Khalid surprises him by suggesting they go to the upcoming rug sale together, and then again by asking him for his shoes, and sitting down to polish them the way his father normally would have. He looks at his son, beaming with love and pride, and Khalid is filled with the love of his family.

Discussion Question 1

How does Khalid feel about the assembly and why?



Discussion Question 2

What is Khalid's first meeting with Niamh like and how does he handle it?

Discussion Question 3

What two ordinary things does Khalid indulge in when his father comes home that make him feel the love and happiness of his family?

Vocabulary

Situated, hypnotizes, raucous, righteousness, dignified, inspiration, innocent.



Characters

Niamh

Niamh is an Irish girl that goes to Khalid's school. She has dark, wavy hair that goes down to her shoulders and smells of almonds. Khalid is infatuated with her, so much so that he becomes tongue tied whenever she is around. She likes books and art, and she is usually in the top three in her class in English exams. Niamh isn't like most girls her age. She dresses with a degree of classy modesty that is feminine and provocative while still leaving enough to the imagination for dreams. She has large green eyes and a beautiful smile that makes Khalid think she is the most beautiful girl he has ever seen. She is also one of the best memories Khalid has, and his thoughts of her keep him going during many lonely days and nights of incarceration. In fact, one of Khalid's greatest regrets is that he never managed to get up enough courage to tell her how much he liked her.

Eshan (aka Holgy)

Eshan is a brilliant goalkeeper and a friend of Khalid. At the age of eleven, Eshan made the mistake of announcing that he believed they were all holograms. He repeated this to everyone as often as he could and earned the nickname Holgy as a result.

Mr. Hanwood

Khalid's science teacher.

Tariq

Tariq is Khalid's cousin, and he lives in Lahore. He speaks English, Urdu, and Punjabi. He is now learning Arabic, too. Despite the fact that Khalid's parents believe that Tariq is 'going places,' they still believe that Tariq has too much influence on their son. Tariq and Khalid communicate via computer, often spending hours on line at night after Khalid's family is sound asleep. When Tariq's two year old sister Radhwa dies after a long and drawn out illness, Khalid sends him the first of many emails at his mother's insistence. Their friendship grows from there. Tariq tells Khalid that he has been to Turkey and Medina. He has even seen the first mosque at al-Quba, despite being only two years older than his cousin.

Tariq has invented his own computer game called 'Bomber One,' and the two cousins spend a great deal of time playing it together.



Nico

Nico is a friend of Khalid. He favors wearing black t-shirts with blue low riders. He always seems to be grinning like a mad man. He is the main supplier of alcohol to the kids in the neighborhood because he has an eighteen year old brother named Pete who looks like him. Since the two have a remarkable resemblance, he can use Pete's identification in the local stores. Khalid's mother isn't overly fond of Nico, referring to him as 'cocky.' She feels this way in spite of the fact that Nico is at the top of his class in math and his older brother is at Manchester University taking electrical engineering.

Abdul Al-Farran

Abdul is the man who is in the wire cage next to Khalid in Kandahar. He is just a touch overweight with fat cheeks. He has bushy eyebrows that move like caterpillars when he speaks. He tells Khalid that he was born in Lebanon, but he now lives in Pakistan where he teaches math. He says he traveled a lot, looking for a wife.

He meets a very bad man when he returned from Islamabad. They fight, and he tells the police that Abdul is making bombs at home. His wife tells him to run, but he makes the mistake of going to Afghanistan. This only makes his situation worse. He is thirty five years old, and he begins instructing Khalid as to the real meaning of different Arabic words. He reminds Khalid of his geography teacher, Mr. Giles. Abdul snaps after a session of interrogation, screaming 'Death to America.' This incites a riot like environment before he is finally taken from his cell. Khalid does not see him again.

Mr. Tagg

Khalid's history teacher.

Mother

Khalid's mother has thick, shiny hair which is just starting to show a touch of grey. She is alert and neat, running her household with order and organization. She works in an office at the local primary school. She wears a perfume that smells of jasmine.

Mac

Mac is the fifty-four year old neighbor of Khalid and his family. Khalid's father thinks that at his age, Mac is a bit out of touch and doesn't always appreciate the comments he makes to Khalid.



Tony Banda

Tony Banda is another friend of Khalid. Tony is a great football player in Khalid's mind. Unfortunately, his mind is often on something other than the rules. He is carded by the referee for his conduct. He has a soft spot for Lexy who is blonde with large blue eyes and a figure that makes them all a little weak.

Mikael

Mikael is another friend of Khalid.

Holgy

Holgy is another of the regular group of friends that hangs around together. He is also a great goalie. He has large calf muscles, giving his legs strength. He croaks like a sea lion every time he makes a great save. Khalid considers him to be the best player. Holgy has thick brown hair and is considered to be a bit of a 'nutter.'

Khalid

Khalid is a typical fifteen year old boy who has known little more than his life in Manchester, England. He has two younger sisters. His parents, although Muslim, are not traditional. His father believes that Khalid and his sisters will find their own way where religion is concerned. So, he concerns himself more with teaching Khalid the value of respecting his elders. Khalid has been raised to be honest, to care about his family and friends, and to help out at home.

His main interests include hanging out with his mates, football, and playing video games on line with his cousin Tariq and others. Khalid goes to Rochdale High School along with his friends. Until the Easter break, during which he and his family go to Karachi, Khalid is ignorant of most things in life. Then, while they are far from home, his father vanishes. Shortly afterward, Khalid himself is taken hostage and accused of terrorism. Held without rights, trial, or considerations of any kind, he is tortured until he finally signs a confession. As a result, he is shipped to Guantanamo Bay. By the time he is finally released, two years have passed. Khalid has grown both physically and emotionally.

Nasir

Nasir is the youngest of six children who grew up in Pakistan in a mountain village. He has lived in England for twenty-five years, but he has only been in Rochdale for three weeks. He owns the new shop on the main street, having always wanted to be his own boss. His mother still lives in Pakistan, about fifty miles from Karachi.



Abdullah

One of the regular visitors to Khalid's auntie's home in Karachi, Abdullah is twenty-six years of age and is a bookkeeper. He has a scar on one cheek and penetrating eyes, with a nature that is too serious. He has a bushy, black beard and wears a cloth around his head. He speaks little of current events like most of the rest of the visitors who arrive, choosing instead to confine his conversations to the subject of Islam and his efforts to get Khalid's father to go to mosque with him. After several refusals, they mostly leave each other alone.

Jim

Jim is a white-faced man who approaches Khalid in the Karachi bazaar. He offers assistance because Khalid looks lost. He is a broad shouldered man who is studying Eastern languages in London. He is also a self-proclaimed genius. He helps Khalid find Khalid's father's flat. Jim warns Khalid about the backhanders, drug traffickers, and CIA types just looking for anyone who might be an al-Qaeda suspect. They are obsessed with finding dirty bombs. He warns of men disappearing. Jim is madly in love with a girl named Carla who is an archaeology student.

Fatima

Fatima is Khalid's oldest aunt. Her ailing husband, Khalid's Uncle Amir, is little more than a scarecrow. He remains in bed when they arrive. Fatima is the first to take pity on Khalid when they arrive, recognizing his boredom with familial visitation and showing him the small cupboard where the computer is housed. She encourages him to use it.

Tariq (aka Tariq Van Dam) Waji Hachem

Tariq is Khalid's cousin who lives in Lahore, Pakistan. He is only two years older, but his view of life and reality is much more mature than Khalid's. He has traveled extensively for a young man, and he is well spoken and well read on a number of subjects. Tariq and Khalid get to know each other via the internet, communicating for the first time shortly after Tariq's sister dies. His grief is profound, and Khalid's mother suggests that he write to Tariq and express his sympathies. This begins a friendship that is largely based on video games. When Tariq invents a game called Bomber One, Khalid is supportive. They play it frequently; often spending hours on line after Khalid's family is in bed for the night. Somehow, this game becomes the reason that both Tariq and his cousin are taken into custody, along with half a dozen other gamers around the world who have joined in.

It is likely that Tariq is taken into custody at about the same time as Khalid's abduction. Neither of them is aware of this fact until many months later when, by some fluke of mismanagement, they find themselves in cells next to each other in Guantanamo Bay.



Tariq is relieved to hear his cousin in the cell next to him. At first can hardly believe it, but when the fact is confirmed by a guard, he can hardly contain himself. He has long conversations, explaining first how they were targeted. He tries to absorb the reality that Khalid had believed him to be responsible all this time. He confesses the worst of his behavior to Khalid at that time as well, admitting to having made up stories about Khalid's father in order to stop the torture. At first Khalid hates him, but when he sees him for the very first time as he is being taken out of his cell for a shower, he recognizes the familial resemblance in him. All of Khalid's anger dissolves. From then on, they speak all the time, discussing current events and anything else that comes to mind. Tariq is intelligent, and he has large, soft brown eyes. He, like Khalid and the other prisoners, is kept bald and beardless. He has a high, somewhat squeaky voice, which sometimes grates on Khalid, but both young men are grateful for each other's company. Tariq is left behind in Guantanamo when Khalid is freed, but Khalid vows to get him released as well.

Masud Al-Dossadi

Masud has a small face with ruffled grey hair and a greying beard. He has an expression of quiet dignity despite his captivity and treatment. Masud describes how he is forty-eight years old and has a shop in Cairo. Egyptian by birth, over the past five years Masud had regularly made trips to Afghanistan to purchase goods like necklaces, woodwork, and birdcages to sell at his shop. This time he and a friend had decided to go to Kabul. He describes the desperate situation there and how he then contracted typhoid, forcing him to stay longer. Now, he is classified as an enemy combatant, having come to their attention because his passport had expired while he was ill. He is awaiting transfer to Khandahar. Masud has four children and a wife in Cairo.

Harry Peterson

Harry is the lawyer that is finally assigned to Khalid's case. He has a large, gentle face and his hair is fair and scruffy looking. He has an old fashioned look to him, similar to a teacher and smells of a nice aftershave. He gives Khalid a letter from his father. Harry is a sentimental and soft hearted man who is genuinely touched by Khalid and becomes clearly emotional when they part after their first meeting. He is determined to help Khalid, and return him to his family, although some of his interventions turn out to be more harmful than good. One of these examples is his efforts to ensure that Khalid is not left alone. As a youth, he is entitled to more rights than the adults, one of these being his right to be with others and not subjected to the solitude of confinement. Harry has Khalid transferred almost immediately, but doesn't realize that by doing so he has separated Khalid from Tariq which is the only thing that made his captivity bearable. To make matters worse, the communal style confinement he is placed in is one in which few speak English. Khalid is once again isolated, more so now that he has known the simple joy of sharing his misery with Tariq. Harry is good to his word however, getting Khalid out of jail and back to his family. In fact, from the moment of Harry's first visit, Khalid's treatment from the guards markedly improves. He carefully explains each stage



of the release process to Khalid as they go along, and he is there to keep him company on the flight back to his family.

Jinn (Genie)

The jinn are genies who come for Khalid when he weakens emotionally. They belong to a less earthly realm. One with a purple hat and a wide grin opens his playground to Khalid. Others follow them, in varying forms. Some have swords. Some have wings or powers that are unfathomable. One even comes with a wife by his side, and another is accompanied by an army all dressed in black.

Shafi

Shafi is a volunteer prisoner who reminds Khalid of the rap singer 50 Cent. He is not a rapper, instead preferring to quote the Qur'an. When he is assigned to slop out the cells, Shafi goes in and washes the floor and empties the waste bucket. He tells Khalid that two men have killed themselves and that five are attempting to starve themselves to death. He asks Khalid not to do that and talks to Khalid about signs from God.

Lee-Andy

Lee-Andy is a new guard transfer, brought in from North Carolina. She is sweet and gentle, with light brown eyes and reddish hair tied back in a ponytail. She has a smile to match her voice, perfect teeth, and looks to be in her early twenties. She wears a pleasant perfume. During her first short conversation with Khalid, she offers him a chocolate bar. The generosity is part of her nature, but it is among the very few kindnesses that Khalid has known since his capture.

Lee-Andy is also directly responsible for getting Khalid to see a doctor when his ear becomes infected. She also manages to create time for Khalid and Tariq to talk through the fence to each other, standing guard nearby. Khalid is genuinely sorry to see her leave, despite having at one time wondered if she was a plant sent to spy on him and his cousin. Another gift she gave him was to tell him how to snap out of troublesome frames of mind by snapping his fingers in front of his eyes. By doing so, he was able to alter his thought patterns to ones that were less destructive. It is a skill he employs often after she tells him about it. He would never forget her kindnesses, even though he is unable to tell her so when she comes to say goodbye.

Wade

One of the guards in Kandahar, Wade comes from Atlanta. He treats the prisoners with more decency than most. However, the reason becomes apparent when he tries to convince them they should convert from Muslim to Christianity, offering to bring in



pamphlets. He gives Khalid a piece of chewing gum in an unexpected moment of kindness.

Khalid's Father

Khalid's father works at the Vegetarian First restaurant as a lunch chef. He has been there for over ten years. He works the day time shift that begins at 6 a.m. Khalid has learned a great deal from his father over the years. For instance, he's learned the responsibility of helping to wash up after tea. He tells Khalid that helping his mother shows her that he respects her. Khalid's father is an old fashioned kind of man, who dresses extremely conservative inside and out. He is attentive to what is around him and to the efforts and needs of others.

He dresses in a white shirt and black pants every day. He shines his shoes regularly.

Gul and Aadab

These are Khalid's younger sisters. Gul is the older of the two.

Ashwin Al-Asmari

Ashwin is the other prisoner who was released on the same day as Khalid. He took the plane back to England with him. Ashwin is from Birmingham. He also has asthma, and Khalid finally recognizes him as the only prisoner down the line who had coughed all night long in Camp Delta. The guards had insisted he was only pretending to have asthma and wouldn't allow him to have or take his medication. Khalid doesn't see him again after they are led into a long grey building.

Professor Wolfson

Professor Wolfson is the man whose job it was to help Khalid settle back into a normal life with as little difficulty as possible. He looks like any office worker as he is dressed in grey slacks and a white shirt and carries an armful of blue folders under one arm. He tells Khalid that he can probably go home the following day, but he warns Khalid that many who experience an ordeal of this kind struggle when they get home again. He warns that even listening to a group talking might be hard at first. Khalid might feel faint or feel like leaving the area, but he cautions Khalid to remember that his reactions are normal. Even a touch or a hug might feel threatening at first, he tells him as he walks him through an average day, pointing out some of the issues he might have to face.



Symbols and Symbolism

On Line Games

Taking up a great deal of Khalid's time and effort are a series of on line games including Counter Strike, Grand Theft Auto, and StarCraft. Tariq creates his own game, called Bomber One, which they play together frequently and which inevitably results in their incarceration.

Urdu

The main language spoken in Karachi.

Bomber One

Bomber One is the game that Tariq creates. It is a simplistic game in which multiple players conspire and plan to bomb a fictitious city.

Shalwar Kameez

Shalwar kameez is the name given to the typical garb worn by Muslim men in Karachi.

Earmuffs

Earmuffs are placed over Khalid's ears before they leave for Guantanamo Bay. They are tight and painful, but they are kept on until they land.

Beany Holes

Beany holes are holes in the metal doors at Guantanamo Bay that allow soldiers there to unlock the shackles on their prisoners while they are secure in their cells.

Qur'an

The Qur'an is the Muslim bible, an English copy of which is provided to Khalid in Guantanamo Bay.

Flip flops

Flip flops are the only footwear that Khalid and the other prisoners are allowed to wear.



Shackles

Shackles are the confining chains and locks that are affixed to Khalid and all other prisoners whenever they are taken out of their cells for any reason.

256

Khalid is assigned the number 256, and he is addressed as such for the duration of his confinement at Guantanamo Bay.

Typhoid

Masud Al-Dossadi becomes ill with typhoid fever, and this prevents him from leaving Afghanistan before his passport expires. This causes the authorities to detain him.

Mecca

Mecca is where Muslims face when they are called to prayer.

Red Cross

The Red Cross is an organization that gives Khalid and other prisoners paper and pens to use to write letters home.

Water-Boarding

Water-Boarding is a kind of torture that Khalid experiences.

Confession

Khalid is coerced into signing a confession after various means of torture are employed.

Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda is the group that Khalid and other prisoners are accused of belonging to.

Prevention of Terrorism Act

The Prevention of Terrorism Act is the blanket under which Khalid's arrest from the plane is made possible.

Cairo

Cairo is the location of Masud Al-Dossadi's shop.



Settings

9 Oswestry Road

The home address of Khalid and his family in Manchester.

Vegetarian First Restaurant

The place where Khalid's father has worked as a chef for the past ten years.

Rochdale High

The high school that Khalid attends in Manchester.

Cuba

Country where Guantanamo Bay is located.

Guantanamo Bay

Detention center run by American soldiers in Cuba where Khalid and Tariq are both held for a time.

Karachi, Pakistan

Where Khalid's father's sisters live and where Khalid's family goes over Easter vacation, having learned that Khalid's grandmother has just died. This is where Khalid's father was brought up.

Sandspit

The name of the beach in Karachi.

Agha's Paradise

One stop supermarket in Karachi that sells Western foods.



Kandahar

This is one of the facilities where Khalid is taken. He spends months in Kandahar before being transferred to Guantanamo Bay.

Kabul

Kabul is where Masud and his friend go to see the situation first hand. They get stranded because he becomes ill and must stay until after his passport expires.

Camp Delta

Camp Delta is the name of the facility in Guantanamo Bay that Khalid and others are transferred to after their stay in Kandahar.

Islamabad

Islamabad is where Tariq was picked up for playing Bomber One.

Cairo

Cairo is where Masud Al-Dossadi had his shop.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is where Abdul goes to escape police when a man he argued with lies and tells authorities that he is making bombs at home.

RAF Northolt

RAF Northolt is where Khalid lands first when Harry brings him home. He must stay long enough for exit interviews; and, he also receives help in adjusting back to real life before he is actually allowed to go home.

9 Oswestry Road

9 Oswestry Road is the home address of Khalid and his family in Manchester.



Vegetarian First Restaurant

Vegetarian First Restaurant is where Khalid's father has worked as a chef for the past ten years.

Rochdale High

Rochdale High is the high school that Khalid attends in Manchester.

Confession

Khalid is coerced into signing a confession after various means of torture are employed.



Themes and Motifs

Guantanamo Bay vs Holding Facilities

When Khalid arrives in Guantanamo Bay, the first thing he learns is that he is now the property of the United States Marine Corps. Soldiers walk the perimeter with dogs even though the bleached out area is encircled by high fences. The fences are in turn topped with six feet of razor wire and monitored by watchtowers at either end. More fencing can be seen in the distance and the ground is hot and baked. This is a facility that takes its job seriously and was built to house assassins, American enemies and threats to the security of the nation. Here, Khalid is nothing more than a terrorist whose intentions are to blow up American cities. Inside, a metal door has 'beany holes' he is instructed to stick his hands and feet into, and his shackles are removed. Provisions which include flip-flops, two white towels, two blue blankets, a wash cloth, soap, shampoo, toothpaste, a bottle of water and two buckets are provided immediately. The schedule is rigid as well, and Khalid soon times his day by the regiment of life there.

By comparison, life in the holding facilities is designed strictly to remove all hope and coerce a confession. Comforts are withheld or provided intermittently so that hope can be given or removed. There are no rights, no trials, and no rules beyond finding a way to glean information from those they bring in. It matters not that the person in their 'care' may be innocent. The food given is mostly thin dry bread and water, and clothes are given, then taken as is heat and air conditioning – all tools to break the person being held. Once a confession is given and papers to that effect are signed, the prisoner is now a legitimate enemy combatant and his future is defined. He will be sent to Guantanamo Bay where all such terrorists go.

Khalid Before vs Khalid After

Khalid Ahmed, the main character in the story Guantanamo Boy, is a young man of just fifteen when his life changes forever. He goes from being a reasonably well adjusted teenager with a circle of friends, outdoor activities such as sports that they enjoy together, reasonably good grades and an interest in on-line video games, to a young adult who is old beyond his years, and has an entirely new view of life and world politics – things he gave little thought to before.

Before his captivity, Khalid hated to be seen with his father who maintained an old-fashioned exterior and embarrassed him. He often wished that his father would find his way to a more up-dated lifestyle like so many of his friends' parents did, or at least update his style of dress, and resented having to acknowledge their relationship in public. The height of embarrassment for Khalid was to be seen by a girl he liked while he was with his father in public.



When Khalid is taken captive, he goes through a cycle of growth partially due to the fact that he spent enough time alone to realize the importance and value of the family he missed so much, partially because he can hear his father talking to him – lessons gently given as he grew up, and partially because of brief exposures to other prisoners who were not only more educated than he was, but also more worldly in their knowledge and opinions. Exposure to these prisoners, which included his cousin Tariq, makes Khalid realize just how little of the world he knows and how shallow his life has been up till now. He wonders, frankly, where his brain has been. Though the experience was difficult, it can be said that Khalid gained some insight into life and the world that he was missing beforehand.

Freedom vs Confinement

Khalid is a young man filled with confidence before he goes to Pakistan with his family. He has a feeling of belonging, and he and his friends tend to act as though they are entitled to the life they have. They strut down the streets together, goofing off and joking around. In fact, Khalid never considers the impact of his Muslim heritage on others. On one occasion, he goes to a woman's aid when a group of hooligans are harassing her. He never notices that when he approaches her she is much more fearful of him than of the group that was dogging her steps at the time. Khalid's friends are greatly amused.

After his confinement, Khalid's attitude changes. Instead of feeling entitled to be at home, he is now respectfully dignified and grateful to be there. He sees the life he has with his family as a privilege now and not a right, and enjoys all of the nuances of family life and his time with them. He flashes back to his confinement often, realizing how lucky he is to be home, and thinking about what Tariq still faces every day. His confinement, horrible as it was, gave him a new insight into his life and his attitude towards his family and friends. He now knows that he should never take any of the good things in life for granted, which he did constantly before his captivity. He relishes the opportunity to walk his sisters to school, or help his father and mother at home. In a way, his confinement let Khalid truly appreciate the love and happiness of just being with his family.



Styles

Point of View

Guantanamo Boy by Anna Perera is a story told entirely in the first person perspective by the main character, Khalid Ahmed. Khalid is a fifteen year old boy who lives in Rochdale located near Manchester, England. He has lived there all of his life and his parents, while Muslim, are not rigid in their religious beliefs or behaviors. When Khalid's Aunt dies, his family makes the decision to go to Pakistan to help the remaining family members. When his father goes missing in Karachi, Khalid goes out to search for him but is unsuccessful. The family has no idea what has happened to him, and friends, neighbors and family gather together to help in any way they can. It is only a short time afterward that Khalid himself is taken in the middle of the night from his Aunt's home. This is done in such a way that his family has no idea what has happened to him, which in itself is almost as stressful as the abduction itself.

Khalid is taken to a holding facility, and after multiple interrogations, is transferred to Kandahar. There he is accused of associating with al-Qaeda, knowing Osama Bin Laden, and of planning to bomb key targets in the Western world. To illicit a confession from him, they isolate him, and subject him to a variety of different torture methods used on 'enemy combatants' and eventually, under the duress of water boarding, Khalid finally agrees to sign whatever they want. It is surprising to him that they already have an eight page 'confession' ready for his signature. Once he has signed, he has sealed his fate. From there, he is a legitimate prisoner and he is treated as such. Despite his young age, he is transferred to Guantanamo Bay where his abuse of rights continues. The only difference now is that it is being carried out by American soldiers in an American facility. While he is given towels, blankets, water and food, he is also subjected to noise torture, interrogations, accusations and threats. He is deprived of sleep, food and water, company and education – all against the Geneva Convention. After two years of confinement, Khalid is finally allowed to see a lawyer who manages to free him. Khalid learns a great deal about the world and about himself during his confinement. He appreciates his family and friends a great deal more when he is finally able to go home.

Language and Meaning

Guantanamo Boy is a story about a young man who lives near Manchester, England with his family. His parents are Muslim, originating from Pakistan, and as such there is a blend of languages and descriptions used to tell the story. Beginning in England, Khalid is a fifteen year old who enjoys playing football, hanging out with his 'mates' and playing video games on line. When one of his Aunt's dies, the entire family goes to Pakistan to help out over the Easter holidays. While there, both Khalid and his father disappear under questionable circumstances and though his father manages to return, by the time he does, his son is gone.



Since the story is told in two countries, the language mixture encompasses words like 'brill, nutter, mates, and crisps' which uses language idioms from England, it also makes use of words and descriptions like 'chapattis, curry, and shalwar kameez' along with names of Muslim origin such as 'al-Qaida, Qur'an, halal' along with names like Osama Bin Laden, and character names such as Nasir, the Jinn, Shafi, Tariq, Abdul Al-Farran, and Masud Al-Dossadi. Khalid learns more about the life of a Muslim, going further than simply returning the traditional greeting 'As-salaamu alaikum' and the response of 'Wa alaikum as-salaam'. He discovers that there is value and peace in prayer, and learns bits and pieces of a language he never had any use for before this time in his life. The use of cultural references, and geographically correct names and places lends to the credibility of this novel, and the enjoyment of the read overall, despite the difficult and often heart wrenching content.

Structure

Guantanamo Boy by Anna Perera is a novel of two hundred and sixty seven pages. It is divided into thirty chapters which range in length from two to fourteen pages in length – the average length being nine pages in length. Each chapter is given a heading which describes the overall message the chapter offers. For example, Chapter 1 is titled 'Game.' It describes the game which was created by Khalid's cousin Tariq. The cousins frequently play it online together. Chapter 2, 'Blood's Thicker Than Water,' reveals the plans that Khalid's family has to go to Karachi over the Easter break in order to see the extended family on his father's side after one of Khalid's aunts passes away. The third chapter is labelled 'Karachi' and describes their arrival in Pakistan. The fourth chapter is titled 'Missing' and deals primarily with Khalid's father's disappearance. The next chapter reveals Khalid's abduction, and the next three chapters deal with the kinds of methods used on him to coerce a confession from him. Chapter 9, 'To Kandahar,' deals with Khalid's transfer to that facility. The next several chapters cover his incarceration there until Chapter 16 which is titled 'Guantanamo' and covers his transfer to that facility.

Chapter 19 reveals the depths of Khalid's emotional and mental breakdown as he begins to see 'the jinn' which is the chapter's title. Chapter 23, 'Lee-Andy,' introduces that character and shows the impact of a simple, human kindness, which Khalid has seen little of during his captivity. Chapter 24 introduces Harry Peterson who is Khalid's lawyer. By Chapter 28, Khalid is home. The last chapters deal directly with his reintegration into regular life and the challenges that even simple things present after so being held so long in isolation.



Quotes

We have a document that proves you and your accomplices plotted online to bomb a number of cities throughout the Western world.

-- Angela (Chapter 18 paragraph Paragraph 32)

Importance: This is what Khalid is faced with after water-boarding forces him to agree to anything he is told in order to make them stop before he is killed. Khalid signs eight pages of a 'confession' that is printed for him. As soon as he signs the bogus confession, it is used as a platform against him. It is used as leverage to take him to Guantanamo and as proof that he is the terrorist whom they claim him to be.

They (secret prisons around the world) employ torture as many have done throughout history to gather information and I will tell you, being a lawyer, this subject of human rights is the closest thing to my heart.

-- Ali Abaza (Chapter 20 paragraph Paragraph 38)

Importance: Ali is a lawyer whom Khalid meets the first time he is given freedom to stand in the enclosure outside. Ali believes that the reason Khalid was picked up is largely because he was looking into secret prisons around the world like Guantanamo Bay, and his interest caused his arrest.

Dad hasn't seen his sisters since before you were born and, well, maybe you'll think twice when you know your grandmother has just died and that's why we're going.

-- Khalid's Mother. (Chapter 2 paragraph Paragraph 4)

Importance: The statement of fact reveals the reason that the family will be going to Karachi for Easter break. It puts an end to any complaining or thoughts of staying behind that Khalid might have had.

Kindness is the quickest path to heaven.

-- Nasir (Chapter 5 paragraph Paragraph 2)

Importance: This seemingly simple comment is indicative of the frame of mind of many who come from regions of the world that are anything but kind.

You don't have any legal rights here.

-- One of Khalid's Captors (Chapter 6 paragraph Paragraph 22)

Importance: The man who interrogates Khalid for the first time takes his watch and peppers him with questions that only confuse Khalid. When Khalid asks for a lawyer, the man tells him the truth of the matter. He has no rights.

Giving thanks for something beautiful is the best way to find peace.

-- Khalid's Father. (Chapter 6 paragraph Paragraph 106)



Importance: This comment is made when Khalid's father tries to show him an appreciation for Oriental rugs and the complexity of the work involved. It is another of his many words of wisdom, shared to help Khalid in life.

When did you last see Osama Bin Laden?

-- Sam (Processing in Kandahar) (Chapter 10 paragraph Paragraph 18)

Importance: Sam is one of two men who introduce themselves as the CIA to Khalid during his processing in Kandahar. It is typical of the interrogators that talk to him from the moment of his capture. They don't hear any answers that are outside the parameters of their questions, considering all else to be 'time wasters,' and they are predisposed to believe that all who come before them are terrorists.

Ok, I guess you don't look so old, but you're a not a prisoner of war now - the term is 'enemy combatant' as the military like to say.

-- Red Cross Representative (Chapter 11 paragraph Paragraph 45)

Importance: This off hand comment from the Red Cross gives Khalid just a small indication of the depth of trouble that he is really in. If the Red Cross is unable to help a captive child in custody, there is little hope that anyone else will be able to either.

This procedure [the water torture] will continue until you confess your part in the worldwide bombing campaign you planned with known accomplices.

-- Guard in water torture room to Khalid. (Chapter 14 paragraph Paragraph 40)

Importance: This comment, among others, is an example of the kinds of things that Khalid was told in an effort to get him to disclose information they believed he had about a bombing campaign. It is easy to see why any person, let alone a young man, would be coerced into confessing to anything with these tactics.

Remember, they will have to account to God for this one day.

-- Masud (Chapter 17 paragraph Paragraph 58)

Importance: Masud sees Khalid in the shower and can see that he has been biting and bruising himself in his isolation. He reminds Khalid that there is no shame in agreeing to anything he is asked in order to stop or prevent further torture/abuse. He tells Khalid to be strong, and this last comment is meant to help bolster Khalid's inner strength and remind him that there is hope.

It's the day after yesterday, you dorkhead!

-- Tariq (Chapter 22 paragraph Paragraph 10)

Importance: This comment, made by Tariq, reveals his identity to Khalid when he uses the name 'dorkhead' to address Khalid as Tariq is the only one who has ever called him that.



Well, the trouble is you signed a confession, albeit under duress, and they're using that to detain you indefinitely.

-- Harry Peterson (Chapter 24 paragraph Paragraph 20)

Importance: When Khalid's lawyer is finally able to see Khalid, he reveals just how much Khalid's coerced confession is affecting his custody presently and for the foreseeable future. It makes no difference that the confession was coerced.

I think you'll find you were never arrested.

-- Major Leeth (Chapter 26 paragraph Paragraph 28)

Importance: This comment is made by one of the guards after Khalid insists that he is going to sue them all for their treatment of him after they tell Khalid that he is being released because they no longer consider him to be a threat.

Just remember that every reaction you have to anything is absolutely normal and is to be expected in this type of situation.

-- Professor Wolfson (Chapter 27 paragraph Paragraph 46)

Importance: Professor Wolfson warns Khalid that he might respond to normal situations for awhile in ways that are not normal. His response will be the result of his confinement and isolation. Khalid is told this in preparation for his return to his family and home life.

Well, if I could advise anyone out there, I'd say the only way to prevent violence is to stop being violent, stop thinking nasty thoughts about other people.

-- Khalid (Chapter 29 paragraph Paragraph 12)

Importance: This quote is part of the letter that Khalid wrote to his teacher, Mr. Tagg. He later reads the letter to an entire assembly of students. The statement is just one of many in an overview of what Khalid learned while held captive. Sadly, it is likely more than his captors learned from the experience which they took part in.