

★ **The Bird King**

G. Willow Wilson

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Wars may begin on the battlefield, but they end on a map. *The Bird King* is an exquisite fantasy about the end of Muslim sovereignty in the West, the power of desire to disrupt and transform, and how the privilege of naming can reshape the world.

Fatima was born to be a concubine. Beautiful and strong-tempered, she chafes at her role: “she was something the sultan owned, not dissimilar from the weary-looking pair of trained cheetahs that had come home with him from Genoa.” Her solace is her friendship with Hassan, the royal mapmaker.

A slave and an artist are an odd duo in the palace of the last sultan of Granada: their intimacy is tolerated because they both possess unusual, valuable skills. Furthermore, the kingdom is starving under siege. The year is 1491 AD (896 AH), and three Western kingdoms have combined to claim the last Muslim emirate, Granada, as their own. In the final breaths of the emirate, Fatima and Hassan leave for a new world using magic: Hassan can not only draw maps, but also create imaginary places, using benevolent wizardry, ink, and paper.

The friends are assisted by a jinn, a spirit that lives in one of the palace’s mongrel dogs. They escape by magic and luck, only to watch the world they know crumple. The newly created Spain brings an apocalypse of Western religion, custom, and law, including the Inquisition. Author G. Willow Wilson writes with a masterful control of perspective. *The Bird King* is a perfect novel, balancing universal themes and conflicting cultures with eloquently delivered landscape, character, and dialogue.

The Bird King is a unique fantasy that combines history with magic, creating an imaginary map of a world that has been lost to time.

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