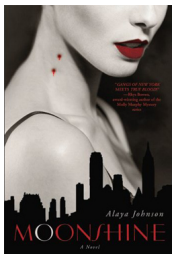
Imagine living in the 1920s—and yet Prohibition, class struggles and equality issues are the least of your worries. That’s the world Alaya Johnson (pictured) brings to life in her debut novel, MOONSHINE, coming May 11 from St. Martin’s Griffin.

MOONSHINE tells the story of Zephyr Hollis, a social activist who teaches night school to immigrants on the Lower East Side. Short on cash, Zephyr agrees to help a student, the mystifying Amir, bring down the most notorious mob boss in New York City. But Amir hides his true agenda from Zephyr and puts her in the crossfires of gangsters, vampires high on a new blood-based street drug and a family feud that has reached its boiling point.



At the start, MOONSHINE gives the impression that its story is centered on a vampire/human society. But that’s no the cast: It’s a human and Other society, the Others being any immortal, mythological creature the reader can think of. The only problem with this approach is that unless the reader is a full-blown fantasy devotee, some of the terms used to describe these beings won’t be easily understood.

Our heroine Zephyr is truly a character after feminists’ heart. A cross between Buffy Summers and Sookie Stackhouse, she has the demon-fighting skills to kill any Other and will if provoked, but she’d rather befriend and help the Others gain equality. Plus, she can’t help but fall for Amir, a powerful yet sly Other himself.

MOONSHINE’s plotline starts off shaky, but a quarter way through the book, it starts to pick up. The ending is full of action and neatly ties up any loose ends, while also leaving room for Johnson to continue exploring her alternate 1920s milieu in a sequel.

One of the best things about this book is how Johnson brings her characters to life—though this reviewer personally had a hard time identifying with Zephyr’s passion for Amir, since he’s egotistical, shady and a tease. But maybe that’s because Edward Cullen has ruined all chances of me falling for other fictional love interests…

{jcomments on}