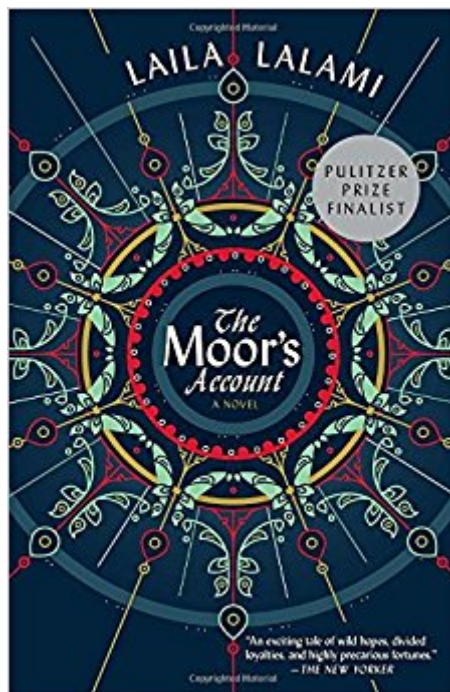


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The Moor's Account



Synopsis

****PULITZER PRIZE FINALIST****NOMINATED FOR THE MAN BOOKER PRIZE****WINNER OF THE AMERICAN BOOK AWARD****A New York Times Notable BookA Wall Street Journal Top 10 Book of the YearAn NPR Great Read of 2014A Kirkus Best Fiction Book of the Year In these pages, Laila Lalami brings us the imagined memoirs of the first black explorer of America: Mustafa al-Zamori, called Estebanico. The slave of a Spanish conquistador, Estebanico sails for the Americas with his master, Dorantes, as part of a danger-laden expedition to Florida. Within a year, Estebanico is one of only four crew members to survive. As he journeys across America with his Spanish companions, the Old World roles of slave and master fall away, and Estebanico remakes himself as an equal, a healer, and a remarkable storyteller. His tale illuminates the ways in which our narratives can transmigrate into history—and how storytelling can offer a chance at redemption and survival.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“An exciting tale of wild hopes, divided loyalties, and highly precarious fortunes.”
The New Yorker
“An absorbing story of one of the first encounters between Spanish conquistadores and Native Americans, a frightening, brutal, and much-falsified history that here, in her brilliantly imagined fiction, is rewritten to give us something that feels very like the truth.”
Salman Rushdie
“Stunning. . . . The Moor’s Account sheds light on all of the possible the New World exploration stories that didn’t make history.”
Huffington Post
“Lalami has once again shown why she is one of her

generation's most gifted writers. •Reza Aslan, author of *Zealot* "Compelling. . . . Necessary. . . . Laila Lalami's mesmerizing *The Moor's Account* presents us a historical fiction that feels something like a plural totality . . . a narrative that braids points of view so intricately that they become one even as we're constantly reminded of the separate and often contrary strands that render the whole. •The Los Angeles Review of Books "Richly rewarding. •NPR "A bold and exhilarating bid to give a real-life figure muzzled by history the chance to have his say in fiction. •San Francisco Chronicle "[A] rich novel based on an actual, ill-fated 16th century Spanish expedition to Florida. . . . Offers a pungent alternative history that muses on the ambiguous power of words to either tell the truth or reshape it according to our desires. •Los Angeles Times "Estebanico is a superb storyteller, capable of sensitive character appraisals and penetrating ethnographic detail. •The Wall Street Journal "Feels at once historical and contemporary. . . . For Lalami, storytelling is a primal struggle over power between the strong and the weak, between good and evil, and against forgetting. . . . Lalami sees the story [of Estebanico] as a form of moral and spiritual instruction that can lead to transcendence. •The New York Times Book Review "Meticulously researched and inventive. . . . Those interested in the history of the Spanish colonization of the Americas will find much to like in *The Moor's Account*, as will lovers of good yarns of faraway lands and times. •The Seattle Times "Excellent historical fiction. . . . The way the Moor's account differs from the Spaniards is amazing. It's a play on perspective in more ways than one. •Ebony "Artfully conveys the politics and power dynamics of bondage. . . . Eloquently examines the subjectivity of narrative and the creation and manipulation of the truth. . . . With this magnificent novel, Lalami, through fiction, has penned a revelation and tribute to truth. •The Millions "Tremendous and powerful, *The Moor's Account* is one of the finest historical novels I've encountered in a while. It rings with thunder! •Gary Shteyngart "Laila Lalami's radiant, arrestingly vivid prose instantly draws us into the world of the first black slave in the New World whose name we know •Estebanico. A bravura performance of imagination and empathy, *The Moor's Account* reverberates long after the final page. •Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Laila Lalami is the author of the short story collection *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, which was a finalist for the Oregon Book Award, and the novel *Secret*

Son, which was on the Orange Prize long list. Her essays and opinion pieces have appeared in the Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, The Nation, The Guardian, and The New York Times, and in many anthologies. She is the recipient of a British Council Fellowship, a Fulbright Fellowship, and a Lannan Residency Fellowship and is an associate professor of creative writing at the University of California at Riverside. She lives in Los Angeles.

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I was skeptical but I couldn't pass up a fictional account of a famous historical trek, the journey through the Gulf Coast taken by several Spanish soldiers after the disaster that struck Narvaez's journey through Florida. As Spain was exploring its new territories, a new expedition sought out riches in Florida. Led somewhat ineptly by Narvaez, the soldiers find themselves unprepared for Florida natives and terrain, and eventually lose many to sickness and natives made hostile by aggressive Spanish "inquisition", especially seeking gold. One of the members of the expedition is a "Moor", a native of Morocco who sold himself into slavery to feed his family and was a servant to one of the hildagos on the expedition. The book is a fictionalized account from his perspective. Lalami does an incredible job writing as a man who has lost his status, and his hope. Before a devastating drought he was a merchant, but lost everything. To save his family he becomes a slave and eventually travels to Florida with one of the leaders of the expedition. However, after a calamity which leaves only three Spaniards and himself alive, the narrator adapts to his surroundings in the Gulf Coast and to the people and languages much more effectively than the Spanish, who cannot believe they are held in contempt by the natives. Mustafa and the Spaniards live and continue to move south and west in the hopes of meeting other Spaniards or discovering Spanish settlements. They have few skills, so often are asked to do women's work by the tribes with whom they live. Mustafa displays an ability to heal using herbs and other medical knowledge, and the four gain a following. Eventually, after almost eight years in the wilderness they encounter a Spanish settlement. Having spent time with the "Indians" they are moved by the plight of the Indians they see in Spanish custody, who are made into slaves and forced into conversion to Christianity. Even as they gain acclaim for surviving their trek, they are called on to give evidence for a new expedition meant to claim more land and make more slaves for Spain. The book is exceptionally well-written, obviously based on extensive research because several of the survivors wrote official accounts of their experiences. Of course there was no official account from Mustafa because he was a slave at the time. I'd recommend this book to anyone who likes history, exploration, the Spanish conquest of the Americas, but also people who enjoy reading about a

man's struggle with his own decency and honor. Hats off to Lalami, quite an excellent book.

The book started slowly and I don't know if it was the author getting her groove or me getting my bearings but after a chapter, this book just takes off. It's such a clever, plausible, enjoyable story and I was in love with the characters and on the edge of my seat for the last quarter of the book. It would be easy to be a little patronizing using the protagonist's voice but *The Moor* rings true and you go from neutral observer to fan in no time. The book could have been twice as long. There will be a movie but I doubt it will manage to be as good. Thank you Ms Lalami for a terrific couple of days with your characters.

A young man from North Africa sells himself as slave to European traders and ends up in Seville. After living there has a house slave, he is sold again, and this time his new master takes him to the new world--La Florida. Here the Spaniards try to look for gold amongst Indians, and the author describes in detail the conflict that ensues between the two. The Europeans with the Moorish slave go through difficult times. How the hardship removes distinctions between master and slave, and how those distinction reappear when times are good is an interesting dynamic that this book focuses on.

I have read several accounts of Cabeza de Vaca's phenomenal journey with his dwindling company, and always wondered about *The Moor*, his role, and also why he died such an untimely death at Zuni, particularly under circumstances so juxtaposed to his hard-won skills. I thank you, Ms. Lalami, for your skills at bringing his story to life and painting this picture so vividly. Many Moors came to New Spain, thence north into the New Mexico, enriching the cultural blending, the architecture, medicine, folk-lore: I await your next novel!

The Moor's Account is an interesting look at the early exploration of the Americas. Although it is fiction the story is based on written reports from the Spaniards who were exploring after the discovery by Columbus. I had the opportunity to attend a speech by Laila Lalami. She explained about the research that went into the book. I had already read it, but listening to her tell about her interest in the subject and how she decided to write about it made it all the more interesting to me. For those interested in history I would recommend this book.

As many other reviewers have noted, this is great historical fiction that covers a rather unknown part

of American history - and Spanish exploration and culture (including the use of slaves). I found the book engrossing from start to finish, in part due to the fact that the characters - and not just the narrator - changed and grew throughout the book. There may have been a few too many episodes told about the group's adventures with the various tribes they encountered in their wanderings, and I admit that some judicious editing may have been advisable, but each episode had a point of its own that made it well worth reading. I disagree with the reviewers who've criticized the book because it's "made up" - of course it is; it's historical fiction about an expedition about which very little is known, and if the author takes liberties with the one "official" record of the expedition, so what - she acknowledges that it's the work of her imagination, and it seems only appropriate to question the official record, particularly when one looks at the record of the Spanish conquest of South America. This is definitely one of my "top 10" for 2014.

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