



## Black Mamba Boy: A Novel

By Nadifa Mohamed

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Bursting with life and a rough joyfulness, *Black Mamba Boy* is debut novelist Nadifa Mohamed's vibrant, moving celebration of her family's own history.

Yemen, 1935. Jama is a half-feral child scavenging with his friends in the dusty streets of a great seaport. For Jama, life is a carnival, at least when he can fill his belly. When his mother dies young, she leaves him only an amulet stuffed with one hundred rupees. Jama decides to spend her life's meager savings to search for his missing father, rumored to be a driver for the British in the north. So begins Jama's extraordinary journey of more than a thousand miles to Egypt. He slings himself from one perilous city to another, fiercely enjoying life on the road and relying on his vast clan network to shelter him and point the way to his father, who always seems just out of reach. In his travels, Jama will witness scenes of great humanity and brutality; he will be caught up in the indifferent, grinding machine of war; he will crisscross the Red Sea in search of working papers and a ship.

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## Black Mamba Boy: A Novel By Nadifa Mohamed Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #6538343 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Blackstone Audio, Inc.
- Published on: 2010-08-03
- Formats: Audiobook, Unabridged
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 8
- Dimensions: 5.78" h x 1.07" w x 5.42" l, .53 pounds
- Running time: 32400 seconds
- Binding: Audio CD

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Mohamed's beautifully rendered debut, inspired by her father's life, opens in 1935 Aden, Yemen, where 11-year-old Jama and his mother subsist in precarious destitution: Jama spending his days on the streets with other "market boys" while his mother works long hours for little pay at a coffee factory. When his mother dies, Jama briefly returns to his family's home in Hargeisa before running away to search for his long-absent father, who he believes is in Sudan. His quest leads Jama into Italian-controlled Eritrea, where he joins Mussolini's Fascists in exchange for food and shelter, and Mohamed delivers graphic descriptions of the horrifically savage treatment the African askaris received at the hands of the Italians. After the Italians are deposed, Jama settles for a few years into village life, before his wanderings take him to Egypt. Jama is a charming protagonist whose peregrinations--assisted by clansmen, kind strangers, and ghostly visitations--are directed more by historical and biographical significance than by the demands of plot. Mohamed vividly recreates the complex atmosphere of the era, and her personal investment in the story gives it a passionate edge.

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From [Booklist](#)

Set on the rough streets of Yemen in 1935, *Black Mamba Boy* tells a slice of history that seems all too modern. When Jama and his mother are abandoned by his father, they move to Yemen to try and make a new life. Rejected by the relatives they live with, Jama spends most of his days on the street. When his mother dies young, she leaves him with 100 rupees, which he decides to spend searching for his father. His journey takes him over 1,000 miles. Like other heartbreaking tales of child abuse and abandonment, *Black Mamba Boy* can be hard to take at times. But this debut novel is worth reading through to the end. --Marta Segal Block

Review

An accomplished first novel. --Independent

## **Users Review**

**From reader reviews:**

**Willie Blackburn:**

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**Doris McNeal:**

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**Andrew Thompson:**

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**Judith Smith:**

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