



Exiled: Memoirs of a Camel

Kathleen Karr

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Ali is a young camel in Egypt when he is captured by humans. Determined to "work, but never surrender," he earns a reputation as a disobedient animal and is sold to an American colonel. The year is 1856 and Ali soon finds himself in Texas as part of the U.S. Camel Corps. Crossing the landscape of 19th century America, Ali learns to balance his pride with the needs of his new companions, and slowly matures into a noble creature.

Compellingly written from the camel's point of view, this unusual book offers a fresh and unusual perspective on a little-known slice of American history.

Exiled: Memoirs of a Camel Details

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From Reader Review Exiled: Memoirs of a Camel for online ebook

Mirrani says

A story of change set in the time when America is first expanding, Exiled is an amusing history of the United States not often told. Based in a time when camels were taken from Africa and brought to help the military explore the deserts of our own country, this is a work of historical fiction that should not be missed. Readers of all ages will experience first hand, through the eyes of Ali the camel, what it is like to be taken from all that you know, to be forced to work for people who do not understand you, but to also manage to find joys in the new life ahead of you while remembering the life that was left behind.

Hope prevails through the struggles surrounding this book and even the most contrary of people have a mirror to themselves, someone who is willing to help those who are struggling or misunderstood rather than ignore or force them into slavery. In fact, one of the camels was so loved that his bones are on display at the Smithsonian.

The story is not only told from the camel's perspective, but also blends in a very Muslim perspective in to the actions and motivations of the main characters. Ali has come from Egypt, he was raised in a very different culture from what he is sent into, but his perspective doesn't change. His heart remains with his country, his past, and his culture, making a very unique blend of character and story that makes the adventure all the more real.

Witty and touching, this is a book to be read in chunks to young children, to be given to older children to explore on their own, or to be shared with adults of any age. A quick but touching read, Exiled is a book that you will not want to put down, and this review, no matter how well written, could simply not do it justice.

Bish Denham says

If you or your kids want to learn about a little known bit of American history, written from the POV of a camel who lived through it, then Exiled: Memoirs of a Camel is for you! In 1856 a ship-load of camels was brought from Egypt to Texas. Another ship-load arrived the following year. It was hoped the camels would be useful to the U. S. Army for carrying supplies across the desert southwest. With Edward F. Beale in command, some of the camels were used to find a middle way to California. The road they broke is Interstate 40, parts of which became known as Route 66. The camels were also used to deliver mail in California. When Beale's favorite camel, Seid, died he had the bones sent to the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History where his skeleton is on display. Those camels left in Texas helped map and explore the desert area of Big Bend. The Civil War put an end to the camel experiment.

Exiled is the story of Ali, a camel who goes out to California. He is both feisty, loving and humorous. Being a properly raised Egyptian camel, he is Muslim. At first he has little respect for his captors. But over time, Ali, develops a grudging affection for some of the "Infidels."

If you find the word infidel, or references to the Quran offensive this book might not be for you. But that would be a shame because there is so much more to the story.

Thistle says

I should have hated this book. There were so many reasons for me to not finish it:

- 1) It was religious. So very very religious. A book written from a camel's point of view still mentioned the Quran and Allah more than once a page. The camels were all religious. It boggled me. If it had been any other religion, I would have tossed the book out, but I know so little about this one that learning new things kept me reading.
- 2) I love talking animal stories, however I like my animals to be animals, not people in animal shape. These camels might as well have been human. (Did I mention they were religious?)
- 3) The book did something I hate to see in animal stories: Impossibly, knowledge passed between animals and humans. The main character camel was born wild, his mother named him Ali. When they were caught by humans, somehow they knew his name was Ali -- he kept that name though the whole book, no matter how many times he changed hands with no communication between people.
- 4) *spoiler* Ali spends the first half of the book in love with a female camel. Finally she chooses him, they're in love, have babies, escape and live happily in the wild, blah blah. She dies and it's addressed with no more than a sentence, something like "Because of Allah's will, she was taken.". There's ZERO reaction from Ali, nothing, no more mention of it than that sentence, no reaction from him, nothing. The whole darned plot of the book was about him loving her and wanting her, then she dies and NOTHING?

So why did I keep reading it? I don't know. I was sure when I hit the halfway mark I would stop, but when I did I figured I could just read a little more... then I hit the 75% mark and figured I'd finish it. I really don't know why I didn't hate it, I really should have. The writing was technically fine. The story could have been really interesting (it was based on real history "in the 1850s the U.S. army shipped camels from Egypt and tried to train them in the Texas desert"). I don't know.

Marion says

a young adult book/pre-teen maybe. Interesting subject idea- I never knew that the US Army had the idea to create a Camel Corp. Camels were brought over from Egypt in 1856/7 in an attempt to create a force usable in the desert southwest. the idea failed and the camels were sold off or let go. Camel sightings were recorded into the 1920's. Pretty crazy. the skeleton of one of the original camel's is in the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. Interesting- yes. The book is told from the viewpoint of one camel. It was quite good in the beginning but it got so sappy when the author had to add all the love interest and jealousy, rivalry that was a bit far fetched. Of course there is competition for mates but it was written in a overly human and dramatic way. I have spent time with camel's and ridden them for several days through the desert so it was of interest to me just got too sappy.

Carol Royce Owen says

In 1856 and 1857 camels were brought by boat from Egypt to be part of the United States Camel Corps, an experiment of then Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis. The camels were trained in Texas and used to help

transport material, especially in the building of roads through desert terrain. When the Civil War broke out the experiment ended and many of the camels were sold off to mines and circuses or escaped.

Exiled: Memoirs of a Camel is told by one camel, Ali, who is brought over on the first transport. Having been told by his mother that the destiny of their kind has always been tied to man, but that he should learn to work but never surrender, "You will learn to bend without stooping," Ali has fought his first owners, refusing to give them what they wanted as they were mean and used whips to try to gain his submission. When sold to the Major-Sir who would take him to America, he is then paired with a kind camel master, Hadji Ali, nicknamed Hi-Jolly, who will become Ali's life long friend.

With Ali on the ship are many other camels including those bred for wrestling, and an orphaned camel named Seid (based on historical notes, a camel who became the favorite of Edward F. Beale who kept the camels on his land and whose bones can be seen at the Smithsonian Institute). And there was also several females including one named, Fatinah, who later becomes Ali's mate, and another who delivers a baby boy during the journey, who is named Uncle Sam (also based on historical notes).

Amber says

Ali, the spirited dromedary camel (that's a one-humped camel), has a story to tell of growing up and living under the shadow of the man-beasts. He is born next to the Nile River in 1855 and is blissfully happy during his milk-days with his mother. Then he is captured by the man-beasts and quickly learns the difference between yield and submit, as his mother tried to teach him. "We camels never submit willingly. Work, but never surrender," she tells Ali.

A year later, Ali was sold to an American man named Edward F. Beale who was in charge of the (experimental) United States Camel Corps. He made the terrible voyage across the Atlantic Ocean to embark upon the noble mission of building a great road, like his ancestors before him did in his own great homeland. Ali greatly misses his mother country, and yearns for his freedom. Will he ever be able to accept his new life in this new land and achieve that independence he aches for?

Kathleen Karr gives wonderful insight into the mind of a very astute camel as well as some actual history of the U.S. Camel Corps in the years of 1856 and 1857 and some of the people who played a large part in its existence. This is a great book for young people age 10 and up!

Lynn says

A fictionalized story of a camel named Ali who is transported from Egypt to Texas as the United States Camel Corps. Two shipments in 1956 and in 1957 came to Texas in an experiment in using camels to travel in the American desert. The story is told from the camel's point of view and covers birth in the Egyptian wild, capture by Egyptians, attempting to tame the camel and being sold to American soldiers. The camel takes a three month trip on ship to Texas and the life under their new masters. The book is aimed at 8-10 year olds. My personal feeling and it often true about the American Story book set and the Diary books aimed at this age, is that the true story is far more interesting than the fictional story told. I learned far more reading the explanation of the true story in the back of the book than reading a fictional story that was much less interesting.

Darlene says

I wish I had the hardbound book. I am glad that I was able to get the Kindle Unlimited version.

This is a fun little story based on true events between the gold rush and civil war. Camels were brought to America to aid in travel in the western deserts. This is from a fictional camel's point of view. Being from the land of the pyramids, Ali prays to Allah as is the custom from where he comes from.

Author, Kathleen Karr, wrote lovable characters. At times, there is a stretch of unbelievability, such as how the camels can understand both the language of their birth and then the English here in America. But if one takes a moment to think of how our pets seem to understand us and seem to know, regardless of language, what we want from them. Whether they mind us or not shows they have free-will like we humans do. So when the camels decide not to do what they are told it is because they don't want to. I found that humorous.

This is a great book to use as teachable moments. From our own history, and the real camel importing, Comanches, geography from Egypt across the sea to Texas and on to California. Comparative religions and the similarities between peoples. And, of course, spend time learning about CAMELS. I have read a few books about camels lately and I am falling in love with them!

This is a great book for children of any age, even 65-year-olds! ;-)

Ricardo says

This book was a great read, and gives you the little known US military history of the US Camel Corps. through the eyes of a Camel. By far one of the best books I have read

Heather says

Cute, quick little novel about a lesser known piece of history in the US army! I loved the camel point of view!

Miles says

In 1856 and 1857 United States Secretary of War Jefferson Davis imported camels from Egypt to serve the US Military in Texas and further West. This is their story, written from the point of view of one of the camels, Ali.

"Allah in His infinite wisdom created my kind, and I have no grudge to bear on that account. Are we not full of His meaning and high design? Are not we Ships of the Desert wonderfully practical? We can survive without water for days. We can live on thorns. But the part about carrying men and goods, and having hair useful for weaving and flesh that can be eaten.... Truly this I could have done without. I also could have done

without exile from my native land. But that, after all, is the meat and drink of my story."

This is a great little story. It was recommended to me by my 12 year old daughter. You will understand the world from a camel's perspective. Really! It is a point of view you probably have not experienced before.

Some of the human characters in the book are based on historical figures. The realistically described background of the wild Southwest and California seems authentic and yet the authenticity is refracted through the eyes of a camel and his friends. A wise camel sees humanity for what it is. The camel's secret intelligence is beautifully portrayed. It's really quite an artistic achievement.

The author loves camels. She feels the world as they do. In the real world descendants of those camels roamed the western US into the 1920s. In this book even their experience as lost souls wandering the vast Western desert many years later is reflected in the experiences of our protagonist, Ali. The book is delightfully short, eminently readable, and enlighteningly poignant.

Heather says

Exiled: Memoirs of a Camel by Kathleen Karr tells a little bit of the story of the Camel Corps from a unique point of view: a camel named Ali. I never knew that the US Army brought two loads of camel to the US in the 1850s. They were trained in Texas (which, honestly, is what caught my attention when reading the synopsis) and then taken to California where they helped build roads and run mail to areas not easily accessible by other animals. Mostly, though, the experiment failed and was ended with the outbreak of the Civil War. Some camels were sold to circuses and private owners. Some escaped. Some were set free (and feral camels were spotted in the southwest for several decades after).

Exiled follows Ali from the time he is a baby in Egypt through being sold at a market and then later transferred to another owner and eventually purchased by "Major-Sir" and taken to the United States. The story continues through his life of work in the camel corps and, finally, what happens to him after the experiment is disbanded. At times it is funny, at times it is sad, and at times it is touching. It is always interesting, and, even though it is aimed at kids in the middle grades, it easily kept my attention. The only oddity is Ali is very much a Muslim camel, and a rather religious one at that. His words for some things (Texas-America, Infidels) are based solely on what he hears humans that he trusts say.

Valerie says

I originally picked this book up because the title fascinated me. I mean, who knew that camels had memoirs?! It didn't disappoint. It may be a youth fiction book, but I believe all ages would enjoy reading it. It was fascinating and I had trouble putting it down!

I even learned a thing or two reading this book. For example, I never knew that our army had a camel corps before and during the Civil War. That's the whole premise behind this story - a camel is sent from Egypt to the United States to be a part of the United States Army Camel Corps. Unfortunately, the Civil War began and the Camel Corps was dismantled in order to route funds to other needed areas. Otherwise, who knows, we could have had service men and women serving in the Camel Corps even today!

I loved that this book is written from the point of view of the camel and details not only his journey, but how he feels about leaving his homeland, whether he should spit/bite someone, etc.

I highly recommend this interesting and brilliantly told tale!

Pamela Barrett says

Exiled is based on a true story about the Camels who were brought to the United States in 1856 from Egypt, as part of the U.S. Camel Corps. They were used to help the army traverse the inhospitable Texan desert and create a new route to California. This cute story is told by a Camel named Ali, and his point of view makes this story come alive; in fact I'm still smiling as I write this because the author's insights into camel behavior is entertaining and funny. Ali's interaction with the other camels, and the humans that tried to work with them, made me feel like I was there journeying with them. Ali also has a love interest named Fatinah, who is very sweet and his interactions with her makes this a good coming of age story for pre teens to read. There are some life lessons woven throughout the story like self control and getting along with others: and Ali gets his moral direction from the time he spent with his mother, and from what he knows about Allah and the Qur'an. Exiled is a children's book that anyone can read and enjoy. I loved reading it; and I learned something new about America's history in the process. 5 stars.

Jessica Chittester says

This was a fantastic little book. Here is not only a tale involving the long lost history of the American camel corps but also a story involving the animals involved. Though a historical fiction, this was deep and enriching. Such beauty. Such life! Everyone how is a history buff and animal lover needs to read this novel.
