



## North of Dawn

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**A couple's tranquil life abroad is irrevocably transformed by the arrival of their son's widow and children, in the latest from Somalia's most celebrated novelist.**

For decades, Gacalo and Mugdi have lived in Oslo, where they've led a peaceful, largely assimilated life and raised two children. Their beloved son, Dhaqaneh, however, is driven by feelings of alienation to jihadism in Somalia, where he kills himself in a suicide attack. The couple reluctantly offers a haven to his family. But on arrival in Oslo, their daughter-in-law cloaks herself even more deeply in religion, while her children hunger for the freedoms of their new homeland, a rift that will have lifealtering consequences for the entire family.

Set against the backdrop of real events, *North of Dawn* is a provocative, devastating story of love, loyalty, and national identity that asks whether it is ever possible to escape a legacy of violence--and if so, at what cost.

## North of Dawn Details

Date : Published December 4th 2018 by Riverhead Books

ISBN :

Author : Nuruddin Farah

Format : Kindle Edition 383 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Africa, Literary Fiction, Contemporary, Eastern Africa, Somalia, Literature

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## From Reader Review North of Dawn for online ebook

### Sanura says

This is the story of an older Somali-Norwegian couple who take in their deceased son's wife and stepchildren, and this story follows these characters as they acclimate to Norway and their new family. This book was tough to rate because on one hand, I enjoyed the story but on the other hand, this novel was written in a way that kept me from finding a rhythm and being fully invested. The language felt convoluted in spots, the POV changed in an instant without warning, and the passage of time in the novel didn't come across as seamlessly as I'd hope. All in all, I'm glad I stuck with it, and as I said it's a good story but I can't help but think of how amazing it could be if written differently.

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### Cherise Wolas says

This is the first novel I've read by Nuruddin Farah, a frequent contender for the Nobel Prize in Literature. A writer from Somalia who now lives in Cape Town, South Africa, his own sister was killed in 2014 when she was murdered along with at least 20 others when the Taliban bombed a restaurant in Kabul. Farah writes fiction about terrorism, and the ravages and scars of it. North of Dawn is about a Somali family, now longtime citizens of Norway, whose children were born and raised in Oslo. When the book opens, Mugdi and Gacalo are facing the impossible - the truth that their son was radicalized, and is a terrorist who has blown himself up. And they must now welcome their dead son's wife and her two children to Oslo, the doing of which will alter their lives. The novel is about many things: the difficulties of assimilation and/or the refusal to assimilate, Somalia's dysfunction, the clash of secular and religious values, the belief that there are two sides of the intolerance coin - isolationism and radicalism. While this is a novel, there is much nonfiction in it, about the history of Somalia, the beliefs about Islam, about Norway, the mass killing of teenagers on the island there, etc. and it is all fascinating and horrifying. A good deal of the history and beliefs takes the form of conversations between the characters, which gives it a graceless, awkward quality. It felt to me that a couple more drafts of the novel to smooth all this out would have done the book good (or been essays). But the characters are intriguing, as is the story, and I kept turning pages despite these weaknesses. I intend to read other novels by him.

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### Jennifer says

I officially started reading this book this week. I couldn't put it down, I was so enthralled.

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### Peter says

Why is the dialogue in Farah's novels so stiltedly formal? Is it based on Somali (and also, in this case, Norwegian) speech patterns? Is it a kind of alienation effect, reminding us that these are authorial creations, a set of points of view put into conversation with each other? But they certainly draw us in nonetheless. I enjoyed this book far, far more than I did *Hiding in Plain Sight*. For me, there's far more dramatic tension, and it's a much more interesting investigation of the politics and psychology of migration--and nation. The

central tenet of the work is that the vast majority of people are caught between the mirrored extremes of jihadists and the racist far right--but of course people like the Somali-Norwegians at the center of this story are among the most vulnerable.

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## **Dorothy says**

Nuruddin Farah is a celebrated Somali novelist who is often mentioned as a contender for the Nobel Prize for Literature. He frequently writes about the effects and costs of terrorism in today's world and when he does, he speaks from personal experience. His sister, who was a nutritionist working for UNICEF, was murdered along with at least 20 others in a bomb attack by the Taliban on a restaurant in Kabul 2014.

Despite his fame in the literary world, I was unacquainted with him before reading this book. I saw a review of it several weeks ago and was fascinated. I immediately added it to my reading queue.

Farah's protagonists here are far away from the centers of terrorism in the 21st century. They are an expatriate Somali couple, Mugdi and Gacalo, living in Oslo. Mugdi had been an ambassador for Somalia in Norway back when Somalia was a recognizable and organized country. When the country tore itself apart in civil war and descended into chaos, they became part of the Somali diaspora and sought refuge in Norway, eventually becoming citizens.

This all happened back in the 1990s and Mugdi and Gacalo, along with their son and daughter, made a comfortable life for themselves in Oslo. But their Norwegian-raised son, in his years of rebellion, joined a radical Islamic cell in Oslo and eventually fled to Somalia to pursue jihad. He became involved with the terrorist organization Al Shabaab and assisted in several terrorist attacks. Eventually, he blew himself up in a suicide attack in Mogadishu.

Mugdi is shocked and disgusted by news of his son's activities and his manner of dying. He wants nothing to do with his memory and says, " How can I mourn a son who caused the death of so many innocent people? I explode into rage every time I remember what he did."

For Gacalo though, her son is still her son, regardless of what he did and she had made a promise to him that if he should die, she would take care of his wife and his two stepchildren. She honors that commitment and makes arrangements to bring them to Oslo.

The widow, Waliya, is a devout Muslim, although she had not always been so observant. Mugdi and Gacalo are cultural but not practicing Muslims. Clashes seem inevitable.

The two stepchildren, a boy and a girl, are twelve and fourteen years old when they arrive. Though Mugdi and Gacalo have a prickly relationship with the mother, they become loving grandparents to these two traumatized children.

The war between Mugdi/Gacalo and Waliya is a stand-in, a model, of the global clash between fundamentalism and secularism. Farah writes of this relationship in intimate and nuanced terms. The result is an incisive and withering portrait of a family soap opera. In revealing how a family falls apart, he gives us a representative of how the nation falls apart. It is a powerful story.

Unfortunately, the prose here does not rise to the level of the story that is being told. It is often clunky and

less than graceful. There's no indication that the book was translated and so I assume it was written in English but the language often seems clumsy and filled with cliches. Moreover, the dialogue given the various characters, particularly the teenagers, frequently seems dissonant with unlikely phrasing.

Initially, I thought to rate the book at four stars because it is an interesting story with well-developed characters, but the more I thought about it, the more I was bothered by that clunky writing. So, three stars it is.

Nevertheless, it was a worthwhile read with its view of how the families of violent jihadists are affected by that member's actions. It is perhaps something that we don't often consider, but they, too, can be victims.

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### **Ron Charles says**

When Nuruddin Farah writes fiction about the ravages of terrorism, the details may be imaginary but the scars are real. The celebrated Somali novelist, a frequent contender for the Nobel Prize in literature, lost his sister Basra Farah Hassan in 2014. A nutritionist working for UNICEF, she was murdered, along with at least 20 others, when the Taliban bombed a restaurant in Kabul.

Farah's new book, "North of Dawn," places its characters far from flying shrapnel but deep in conflicted grief. Like his previous novel, "Hiding in Plain Sight," it's concerned with difficult questions of forgiveness and recovery in the aftermath of violence. The story opens in Oslo, when a Somali diplomat named Mugdi gets word that his only son has blown himself up at the airport in Mogadishu. Mugdi and his wife, Gacalo, suspected their son was radicalized, but news of his death makes it impossible to ignore the truth any longer: They are the parents of a suicide bomber.

Shocked and disgusted, Mugdi wants nothing to do with the memory of his late son. But his wife refuses to relinquish her love for the young man, and she's determined to keep their parental connection alive by inviting their son's widow and her two children to Oslo. That invitation, sent on the wings of affection and duty, ensnares Gacalo and Mugdi in a complicated kindness that will. . . .

*To read the rest of this review, go to The Washington Post:  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/entert...>*

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### **Nat says**

1.5 stars

A mildly interesting novel about Somalian asylum seekers' settlement into Norwegian society. It was bogged down with so much mundane detail and Mugdi seemed to have such an immense loathing for his daughter-in-law and her children up until Naciim and Saafi conformed to his standards. The writing was quite flat and detached.

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## **Chad Walker says**

I really wanted to like this one, I did. I kept looking for a reason for the artificiality of the dialogue, the lack of characterization, the ploddingness of the execution. Couldn't find one. The premise is great.

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## **Ross says**

### **A detailed fascinating read**

I really enjoyed this book. A detailed looked at Somali immigrants in Oslo Norway is gripping and completely worth your time.

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## **Denise says**

To begin with, I have a problem with using "right-wing" as a synonym for "bigot". It's especially jarring in a book meant to show that "Muslim" and "terrorist" are not the same. Farah is correct to state that most of the problems arise from small groups of extremists opposing each other, so he (or his translator) should be more careful with language.

My second problem with this book is that although it deals with Norwegians and Somalians, there is almost no sense of place - Oslo could be anywhere - or of culture, either African or Scandinavian.

And finally, there is a rule that if a gun appears in Act I, it has to reappear before the end of the play. Farah is clearly setting up a dramatic climax, and then it doesn't happen. The book ends, the appendix ties up some, but not all, of the loose ends, and we are left wondering. So unsatisfying.

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## **Booknblues says**

What happens to the citizens of a country when the country collapses and is considered a failed state? There are only so many answers, but they all center around survival and belief. Nuruddin Farah, an established Somali writer who resides in South Africa answers this in his latest book *North of Dawn*.

Mugdi and Gacalo, Norwegian citizens who are originally from Somalia, find they must deal with their son's death by suicide bomb in Somalia. Mugdi disowned his son when he found him to be aligned with terrorists, but Gacalo was unable to do that and instead kept in touch with her son who shortly before his death requested that if something happened to him that she bring his wife and step-children to Norway.

She does that despite Mugdi opposition and they find themselves sponsoring the three refugees:

*On the drive to the airport, Mugdi brims over with sadness and not for the first time thinks of himself as a man born to grief, a Somali concerned about the death of a son or the arrival of a widow and her children when he should be sorrowing over the terminal cancer that has infected his nation. He detests Somalia's dysfunction, unrelenting since 1991, the year the country collapsed after its clan politics had gone awry, and*

*Mogadiscio became a killing field.*

With the addition of the widow Waliya, her daughter Saafi and son Nacim we are given the characters who must adapt to their new home and new expectations and mores. Each follows a different path and their relationship with their new country and family is where the story lies.

At times in North of Dawn the reader is given so much detail, that it bogs down a bit and then unexpectedly without foreshadowing the reader is thrown a huge curveball. The writing often feels so placid, that the reader is not given the necessary emotional release.

I particularly enjoyed the characters of Mugdi and Saafi and I suspect that the author may have been more comfortable with them.

I am happy to recommend this book.

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### **Christine says**

As another reviewer put it, this book was a "mildly interesting novel". That pretty much sums it up for me. I don't regret reading the book (spending the time) but I'm not sure I'd recommend it to others. It felt, at times, like I was reading snippets from this or that character's life but there was no cohesive story line. At times, when it felt like the story might be leading to a suspenseful moment, that moment was gone and not really spoken of again. It just didn't feel like a well knit, purposefully interconnected story. It just kinda fell flat for me. Not a page turner. Not a great read. Just ok.

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### **Sue says**

Somali family settled in Norway, but whose son is lost to Islamic fanaticism. Interesting story. I was surprised at how amateurish the writing was (seemed to me, anyway), given that the author has written numerous other novels & won numerous awards.

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### **Carole says**

North of Dawn was a fascinating read about a Somali husband and wife living in Norway whose son killed himself and many others in a suicide terrorist bombing in Somalia. Although they have conflicting emotions over their son's death, they bring their son's widow and her two children to take refuge in Oslo. The writing seemed somewhat formal and removed, but yet it was very compelling. I couldn't stop reading and was very glad to have the opportunity to discuss North of Dawn in book club.

One of the questions the author posed was -- Why is it that when there is a mass murder committed by a native European (the story takes place in Oslo, Norway), every attempt is made to prove the murderer was mentally ill, but when a radical Muslim kills many, it's blamed on the religion? He makes the point that this could be mental illness as well.

The story was quite sad in many ways, but very interesting and thought-provoking. Chilling ending. While I

caution the potential reader that the writing is somewhat formal and disconnected from feelings, I have to recommend this book as a page-turner that really makes you think. Definitely recommend.

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### **matt says**

I was not a big fan of the writing style. It is clear and direct, but it gives little to no insight into the thoughts and motivations of the characters — which is what I find valuable in a work of fiction. The story is interesting, but unfocused.

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