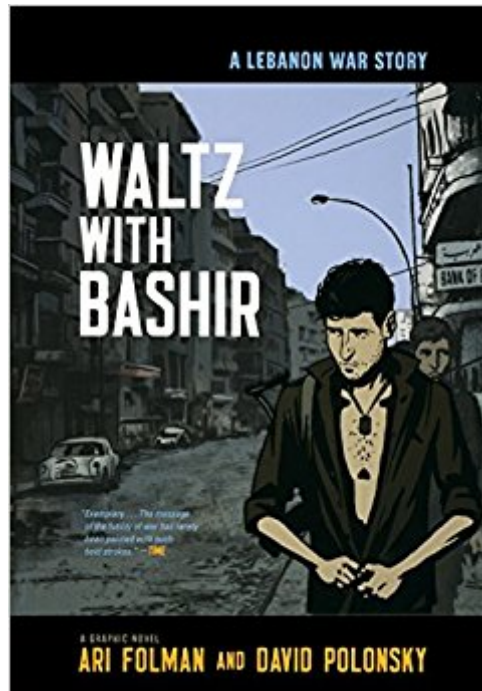




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Waltz With Bashir: A Lebanon War Story



Synopsis

"Special, strange, and peculiarly potent... Extraordinary." *—* Variety One night in Beirut in September 1982, while Israeli soldiers secured the area, Christian militia members entered the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila and began to massacre hundreds, if not thousands, of Palestinians. Ari Folman was one of those Israeli soldiers, but for more than twenty years he remembered nothing of that night or of the weeks leading up to it. Then came a friend's disturbing dream, and with it Folman's need to excavate the truth of the war in Lebanon and answer the crucial question: what was he doing during the hours of slaughter? Challenging the collective amnesia of friends and fellow soldiers, Folman painfully, candidly pieces together the war and his place in it. Gradually, the blankness of his mind is filled in by scenes of combat and patrol, misery and carnage, as well as dreams and hallucinations. Soldiers are haunted by inexplicable nightmares and flashbacks—snapping, growling dogs with teeth bared and eyes glowing orange; a recurring image of three young men rising naked out of the sea to drift into the Beirut battlefield. Tanks crush cars and buildings with lethal indifference; snipers pick off men on donkeys, men in cars, men drinking coffee; a soldier waltzes through a storm of bullets; rock songs fill the air, and then yellow flares. The recollections accumulate until Ari Folman arrives at Sabra and Shatila and his investigation reaches its terrible end. The result is a gripping reconstruction, a probing inquiry into the unreliable quality of memory, and, above all, a powerful denunciation of the senselessness of all wars. Profoundly original in form and approach, *Waltz with Bashir* will take its place as one of the great works of wartime testimony.

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Customer Reviews

Waltz With Bashir is a gripping reconstruction of a soldier's experience during Israel's war in Lebanon told in graphic novel form. The result is a probing inquiry into the unreliable quality of memory, and a powerful denunciation of the senselessness of all wars. Profoundly original in form and approach, Waltz with Bashir will take its place as one of the great works of wartime testimony.

Questions for Ari Folman and David Polonsky Q: How did the book Waltz with Bashir come about?

Ari Folman: The project began as a movie, of course, but the film was more influenced by graphic novels than anything else I've seen. I'm a big fan of graphic novels, and books in general were on my mind throughout the whole process, especially Catch 22, Slaughterhouse Five, and The Adventures of Wesley Jackson--novels by writers who'd experienced war and then taken a step back to look at it in an ironic, funny way. So the book version always seemed obvious to me and we worked on both simultaneously.

Q: Why illustration? Why tell this story with comics and animation?

Ari Folman: It gave us total freedom to do whatever we liked. We could go from one dimension to another, from real events to the subconscious to dreams to hallucinations. It gave us the liberty to play with vastly different elements in one fluid story line, with no boundaries, and also to make something visually familiar and tired--war scenes--look entirely new.

Q: In terms of the drawings, what was the biggest challenge?

David Polonsky: The illustrations had to have a sense of truthfulness. I couldn't pretend I was showing things exactly as they were, although there had to be the ring of authenticity. But I had no references for a lot of the scenes--like the one where Ari is in the Beirut air terminal, for example. Besides the fact that as an Israeli I can't go to Beirut, the building itself was demolished and rebuilt. So I had no idea what the inside looked like. But there were some references to work with: the scene took place in the 1980's and the building was from the 1930's, and there was Ari and the impression that all this European modernist splendor would have made on him as a young soldier. We collected old posters for Lebanese airline companies, and those details made their way into the panels.

Q: The story is Ari's, and very personal, but it's drawn by David. How did you work together?

Ari Folman: We went through a lengthy process with many conversations about what we were creating. At first, David found it difficult to take something so intimate, something that came from me, and draw it. I think it's pretty rare that an illustrator inhabits someone else's history for three years of his life. It was hard for me, too, because I can't draw, and that limitation meant I really had to put myself in someone else's hands.

David Polonsky: For me, the difficulty was creating the young Ari of the 1980's, someone I didn't know. There were very few photographs of that period. I had to come up with someone who combined rebelliousness with conformity and a certain innocence...Ari didn't accept the rules of his surrounding

framework--and he's still like that--but he nevertheless became an army officer. So I gave him a nonstandard haircut and left him unshaven, which is pretty unusual in the army. Ari Folman: My mother says he didn't make me handsome enough. And in the present-day drawings, David had to change my hair color all the time--it kept getting grayer. Seriously, David's gigantic achievement is to have captured my character at nineteen years old. I felt no connection to that person and only became reacquainted with my younger self through David's portrayal. Q: You've insisted that *Waltz with Bashir* is not a political project, but there's no way to read the book or see the movie and avoid making a connection to politics. Ari Folman: The point is that I didn't set out to make a movie or a book with a political message. It's above all a personal story. But certain things were very important to me that you might call "political." We went to great lengths to avoid conveying anything about war that might be heroic. David Polonsky: There was another crucial thing for us, which was to avoid showing the soldiers as victims. There's a phrase in Israel about shooting and crying--we shoot and then cry at our misfortune at having to do it. We didn't want any of that here, no self-pity. There's a clear, simple message: war is terrible. Ari Folman: Listen, *Waltz* breaks no news in terms of what happened at Sabra and Shatila. Everyone knows the reported facts and I had nothing new to say. I was interested in the ordinary soldier, his point of view, and in the chronology of his understanding of the massacre. Q: The book and the movie have come out in the United States at a time when the conflict seems more intractable than ever. Ari Folman: I'm not that pessimistic. Everyone knows that one day there will be a Palestine. In Israel, most people want to be part of the mainstream of ordinary life. They want to earn a good salary, pay less taxes, take a vacation abroad once a year. They don't want to live by the sword. Look at it this way: I made the movie of *Waltz* with German co-producers. Sixty years ago, my parents' families were slaughtered by Germans. My parents were the only survivors. What's sixty years from the perspective of history? Nothing, but the change is profound. I've been to the Sarajevo film festival: think what was happening there thirteen years ago and now they live in peace. So it can be done. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

While it must have been no easy task for Israeli filmmaker Folman and chief illustrator Polonsky to turn their groundbreaking, Golden Globe-^{winning} 2008 animated documentary into a graphic novel, the transition from film to page is flawless. Folman's story is the account of how he came to grips with the repressed memories of the time he was a soldier in the 1982 invasion of Lebanon. As much a study of the fungible nature of memory as a dissection of the ease with which war zones can dehumanize ordinary soldiers, *Waltz with Bashir* uses the same journalistic

technique for self-examination as David Carr did with *Night of the Gun*. Folman goes from one fellow veteran to the next, trying to get somebody to tell him what he can't remember. Bit by bit the holes are filled in – although never completely; the narrative is never cheapened by turning it into a simple mystery to be solved – as Folman sidles closer to the war's central horror: the massacre of Palestinians by Christian militias at two refugee camps. Utilizing frames that seem cut straight from the film, the book threads together Polonsky's darkly gleaming nightmare drawings into a seamless whole. (Feb.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

This is a moving story related in the graphic format that is best known in comic books but has recently come into increasing use for serious novels and novelettes. The subject is an important one, based on real events in Lebanon in 1982. The principal protagonist and many of the other characters are Israelis who were performing their required military service at a time when Israel invaded Lebanon. Sent into Lebanon with little or no understanding of why, they soon found themselves ordered to shoot blindly in various directions, which at first they did with careless abandon. Gradually, however, they became aware that they were killing unarmed women, children and others. Many of these young Israelis suffered afterward from serious psychological problems. For the lead character, the result was complete loss of memory of what he was doing during that period, and the story is developed around his efforts, many years later, to recover that memory by talking with others who were in Lebanon at that time. That is the unfolding story of this graphic book, and it is not appropriate for me to disclose more of it here, or to say who Bashir is except that Bashir is not the protagonist's name. This work is powerful. For those not familiar with the events in Lebanon at that time, it is an intense way to gain some understanding of them, perhaps leading to more traditional book reading to get a broader historical picture. For those who do know the history quite well already, it is a vivid reminder of what is behind more recent happenings involving Israel and Lebanon. The story makes no mention of the U.S. role at the time, which was quite significant.

I found the book "*Waltz With Bashir*", since the film version is adapted from the graphic novel, to be one of the best true statements about war. With countless devastating, illegal and unnecessary conflicts spread about the world there is none (by soldiers from different observation positions) better than an eye-witness account. In near mint condition the book references the film virtually scene by scene.

Well, true events described in a realistic way that you may forget that this is a graphic novel.

Superb treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder and "postmemory." Highly recommended. J. Incledon

This is what real war feels like. Confusing. Shameful. As a soldier in the Iraq war, I felt like the machine had been started by the powers that be. Once the machine is started, it is left unmonitored to do as much damage as possible. It doesn't matter when it stops or where or who it destroys in the process. It is war. You always hear that war is bad. I wish that meant something. Fact is, we will never learn. But there are some of us, Ari Folman included, that know the truth. And we will not be able to smile and go along with things the next time someone decides we need to start the machine.

The book itself is really nice, is a good work but the story I think was more deeply not just another "story about", but the price was amazing!!!.

The story of the 1982 Lebanon war and the massacre in Sabra and Shatila. Let the world never forget. This is about the craziness of war and those that are caught in it. To understand the Middle East this is a must read.

The 2008 animated documentary of the same name by Ari Folman and David Polonsky took four years to complete. The frames of this graphic novel may have come from the film itself, and the sense of the film is uncannily captured without the sound or movement. Both book and film are so powerful I could not make it through in one sitting. A tremendous sense of anxiety and foreboding is generated by white/brown/black monochrome washed with an acid, chemical yellow, the slaverling wild dogs, and the dissociative reality of war on a beach. For anyone who hasn't seen this film or read the graphic novel, I urge you to put aside anything else you have on your plates the minute you obtain a copy of either. It probably won't take more than an evening to read/watch this remarkable act of witnessing, and you will remember it for the rest of your lives. Folman was a nineteen-year old recruit in the Israeli army when he was sent to Lebanon in 1982 to stop PLO rocket attacks and to retaliate for an assassination attempt on the life of Israeli ambassador to the United Kingdom. At the time, many displaced Palestinians were living in refugee camps in southern Lebanon in permanent structures like houses. Their lives did not look temporary, but there was always agitation because their refugee status did not change. In Lebanon, the

sectarian Christian leader Bashir Gemayel aggressively challenged (some might say crushed) the rights of Palestinians and Muslims, and shortly after he became president-elect in the 1982 presidential election in Lebanon, he was assassinated. Gemayel's party, the Christian Phalangists, took their revenge on two refugee camps, Sabra and Shatila. Israeli forces were slow to recognize and respond to an unfolding massacre. It appears they simply did not recognize the evil for what it was--it was too monstrous. The scars of those days left many men unable to understand what had actually happened in September 1982 and their role in it. Forman and Polonsky managed to show us that paralysis that comes over someone, even a group, when something bad is happening. The men protested up to their leaders, but not loudly, confidently, definitively enough. This phenomenon is not unknown. It may even have happened to us. Much of the story is about the elusive nature of memory, and what scars the trauma of war leaves. The authors decided not to try and give voice to the other participants in this extraordinary event, but to just focus on the point of view of someone who was there but not directly implicated in the killing and who retained no memory of the time. We can forget these times of trauma, which is why the Holocaust is constantly referred to and memorialized. One must remember in order to forestall similar atrocities in the future. The art in the film and the book is exceptional for its originality. The drawings are a certain kind of primitive and for that reason are all that we can project onto them. It may be the horror is something we bring because objectively speaking, until real photographs appear at the very end, events are only hinted at: we have the blank stares of the affected soldiers and the bizarrely horrible sudden deaths of soldiers playing on a beach and this all from the point of view of what might be called the Israeli bystanders. They were part of the army, and they had ordnance, but they had little passion for battle, the Israeli participants. The Phalangists were the actors in this case. I am reminded of Montaigne: "There is no hostility that exceeds Christian hostility." The whole record of the movie and the book should go down with oral histories of ancient battles not at all heroic but horrible and instructive and something forever to be avoided. After making this film, Ari Folman said he no longer has interest in traditional filmmaking. There was something even more exciting to him about the art of David Polonsky, who tried using his non-dominant hand to draw so that the smoothness of caricatures did not distract from the roughness of the subject matter. Animation was a relatively new industry in Israel when they began, and since they had no infrastructure, they made decisions that more practiced and wealthier studios may not have made. Both the film and the graphic novel are for grown-ups, or for people who want to be grown-ups.

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