



Waltz with Bashir: A Lebanon War Story

By Ari Folman, David Polonsky

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"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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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

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.

From Publishers Weekly

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—though 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.)

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From School Library Journal

Grade 10 Up—Adapted from the Oscar-nominated animated film of the same name, this is a stunning investigation into one soldier's real-life experience during Israel's 1982 war in Lebanon. In 2006, Folman met up with a friend from his military service days, who told him of the recurring nightmares he had based on their experiences. Folman admitted to not remembering anything from the conflict and started a quest to find out what really happened to him during those traumatic days. He traveled across Europe interviewing former comrades, a reporter who covered the war, and his own psychologist to piece together at least some of the events that he lived through. As the story develops, both Folman and readers relive the terrors of the Sabra and Shatila Massacre, a tragedy that ended in the slaughter of more than 800 unarmed civilians by the Lebanese Christian Militia while Israeli forces let it happen. While Folman tackles many of the same wartime themes of violence and tragedy as Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (Fantagraphics, 2001), the additional explorations of memory and dream make the experience more personal. Polonsky's art reuses still images from the film. His clever eye for detail and creative sense for layout make the images explode on the page. Thought-provoking and emotionally powerful, this is a fabulous story for mature readers interested in wartime narratives told in a fresh, innovative style.—*Matthew L. Moffett, Pohick Regional Library, Burke, VA*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jules Thompson:

The book *Waltz with Bashir: A Lebanon War Story* give you a sense of feeling enjoy for your spare time. You can utilize to make your capable far more increase. Book can to become your best friend when you getting pressure or having big problem using your subject. If you can make reading through a book *Waltz with Bashir: A Lebanon War Story* to be your habit, you can get a lot more advantages, like add your capable, increase your knowledge about a few or all subjects. It is possible to know everything if you like start and read a reserve *Waltz with Bashir: A Lebanon War Story*. Kinds of book are several. It means that, science reserve or encyclopedia or other folks. So , how do you think about this reserve?

Donald Spada:

Waltz with Bashir: A Lebanon War Story can be one of your nice books that are good idea. Many of us recommend that straight away because this guide has good vocabulary that will increase your knowledge in terminology, easy to understand, bit entertaining but still delivering the information. The author giving his/her effort to place every word into joy arrangement in writing Waltz with Bashir: A Lebanon War Story but doesn't forget the main place, giving the reader the hottest and based confirm resource facts that maybe you can be considered one of it. This great information may drawn you into completely new stage of crucial pondering.

Joseph Mesta:

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