



Beaufort

Ron Leshem

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By turns subversive and darkly comic, brutal and tender, Ron Leshem's debut novel is an international literary sensation, winner of Israel's top award for literature and the basis for a prizewinning film. Charged with brilliance and daring, hypnotic in its intensity, **Beaufort** is at once a searing coming-of-age story and a novel for our times—one of the most powerful, visceral portraits of the horror, camaraderie, and absurdity of war in modern fiction.

Beaufort. To the handful of Israeli soldiers occupying the ancient crusader fortress, it is a little slice of hell—a forbidding, fear-soaked enclave perched atop two acres of land in southern Lebanon, surrounded by an enemy they cannot see. And to the thirteen young men in his command, Twenty-one-year-old Lieutenant Liraz Erez Liberti is a taskmaster, confessor, and the only hope in the face of attacks that come out of nowhere and missions seemingly designed to get them all killed.

All around them, tension crackles in the air. Long stretches of boredom and black humor are punctuated by flashes of terror. And the threat of death is constant. But in their stony haven, Erez and his soldiers have created their own little world, their own rules, their own language. And here Erez listens to his men build castles out of words, telling stories, telling lies, talking incessantly of women, sex, and dead comrades. Until, in the final days of the occupation, Erez and his squad of fed-up, pissed-off, frightened young soldiers are given one last order: a mission that will shatter all remaining illusions—and stand as a testament to the universal, gut-wrenching futility of war.

The basis for the Academy Award-nominated film of the same name.

Beaufort Details

Date : Published December 26th 2007 by Delacorte Press (first published 2005)

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Author : Ron Leshem

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From Reader Review Beaufort for online ebook

B. Glen Rotchin says

"You're a different generation, a generation that asks questions. And we are obligated to give you answers."

The quote comes from the novel Beaufort and is spoken by General Kaplan, the only character that the author claims was based on a real person. No truer words are said in the book. This novel questions the sacrifice made by a generation of Israelis who fought an eighteen year military stalemate against Iranian-backed Hezbollah terrorists in Southern Lebanon. Lebanon has been called Israel's Viet-Nam. Until now it was a wound which was too sensitive to touch.

This bold, imaginative, raw and powerful story was a sensation in Israel when it appeared in 2006, and for good reason. Narrated by twenty-one year old second Lieutenant Erez Liberti it maps the loves, intimacies, fears and doubts of the commander and his squad of "puppies" (a dozen or so men barely out of high-school.) They are stationed at Beaufort, a real-life Crusader fortress located in the so-called "security buffer zone" north of the Israel/Lebanon border. The story covers two tours of duty ending with the harrowing withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon.

Erez calls Beaufort "a cage of ugliness right at the center of heaven." It's a perfect description. The geography is magnificent, but just below the fortress in the surrounding villages terrorists plan ambushes, rocket attacks and plant roadside bombs along the access routes in and out of the outpost. The "ugliness/heaven" contrast also describes the experience of the commander and his crew. War after all has its own absurd logic, breeding a kind of euphoria via a surreal co-existence of opposites; stretches of unendurable boredom and fatigue juxtaposed with sudden, razor sharp life-and-death moments; love and mutual dependency between comrades juxtaposed with terrible pain and anguish when one is killed. Erez thrives on it. At least for a time. He says, "My soldiers – I was prepared to die for them, I swear it: I really was ready to die for them. That's not just some slogan; I felt good about it. Seems to me they were willing to die for me, too, and that's an incredible feeling." And later, when his second in command is seriously wounded, "That's Lebanon, you're totally smeared in blood and the guy lying there is your best friend." This portrait of these courageous young men is like the book itself, at once heartbreakingly and exhilarating.

Ayelet Waldman says

I'm on an Israeli novel kick. This one, about the war in Lebanon, is great. The movie was pretty terrific, too.

Wendy says

"We sit up here at Beaufort, disconnected from everything, drawing rockets and mortar shells and explosive devices, endangering our lives, just so we can continue sitting at Beaufort. That's the entire mission. What a shitty feeling." (pg. 130)

Israeli journalist Ron Leshem interviewed IDF soldiers who sat up in the ancient crusader fortress named

Beaufort during its occupation of the Lebanon border area that lasted from 1982 to 2000. In his novel, the exact detailing of the mundane, what soldiers know as hours of boredom punctuated by split-seconds of sheer terror, brings the situation to life. It's a familiar story, an almost free-associative illustration of war a la The Yellow Birds melded to the bored-yet-terrorized kids trapped in an outpost surrounded by the enemy in A Midnight Clear: A Novel. I liked Beaufort better than Yellow Birds because I felt a stronger emotional attachment to the characters (despite, it seemed at times, the narrator's every effort to the contrary), but the narrative's wheels stuck at times under the weight of itself, and with no larger story to propel the reader along--unlike Midnight Clear.

Ultimately, this is a tough book for me to review. While reading I went through many stages of discomfort at my reaction to the often off-putting characters, the stream-of-consciousness style, the depressing material, and my own inability to determine whether this I should take this all with an ironic grain of salt--or was the author feeding this to me straight? I want to think that the narrator's self-professed mysogyny, homophobia, and zeal-for-war was all an act to do his job as officer, and indeed, he does it very well. At some point in the middle I noticed an emotional cycle where the author would take one of the undeveloped side characters, bring them center-stage, soften them up, get them to spill their secrets, and then "waste" them in the next few pages. It was an almost clockwork procedure of emotional manipulation, and made the book easy to put down, hard to pick back up. In the last 60 pages the story at last shakes off its torpor and I finally felt that resonance I had wanted to feel from the beginning.

Yael says

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Leka says

Per ora sono ancora sotto *anestesia*.
E dubito che, dopo un libro così, d'invenzione, ma *vero*, ne uscirò *mai più*.
Anche se, dice e ripete Erez, la voce narrante, si ricomincia sempre.

Mai più, è scritto all'inizio. E poi cominciano i capitoli, 23. In cui vita e morte, senso e non senso, domande e risposte s'intrecciano.

Io invece farò, prime delle ultime pagine. Per cercare, comunque e nonostante, una speranza.

Julia says

I picked this book up for a Modern Middle East class, but I absolutely loved it. Now, I'm kind of obsessed with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the history and current conditions of this area.

Beaufort takes place in 2000 in Lebanon, focusing on a group of Israeli soldiers. This book is amazing; its raw, real, and completely devastating. Written by a journalist, it really gets down to the experience of war, not just the dramatic story line. People see a lot of crap in war, and in many ways, become complete desensitized by it.

The story of this group of men starts before the orders to pull out of Lebanon, then continues through as you see the effect the orders has on the soldiers. Their station is the Beaufort Fortress; a castle in Lebanon that seems to be surrounded by the invisible enemy who attack from nowhere and everywhere. This fortress isn't just territory though; its a symbol, and the Israeli soldiers will do anything in their power to hold onto it.

The writing is fantastic, the plot is based on true events, and the emotion and intensity of this book is incredible. It is a report of history in narrative form; its distressing and frustrating and complex. Go read it.

“You pray to God, to Allah, even to Muhammed or Jesus, or all of them together, because there’s no way of describing how scary it is when [a bomb] closes in on you, makes your heart pound at a rate of four hundred beats to the minute and there’s nowhere to run to.”

Now for my side note rant:

I highly recommend this book; and I recommend people look more into this part of history. I've been doing a lot of documentary watching on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and it is so much more complex and frustrating than we can even begin to understand, and the conditions that these people are living in are terrible. Why does this effect us (if you are in the US), you ask? Because we are paying for it to continue. Oh yes, its true. And its still happening. Two good documentaries to watch are *Occupation 101* and *Death in Gaza* (both on youtube).

But read this book first!

Siv30 says

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Patrick Johns says

A wonderful, rich, entertaining, educating and moving book. This book is in the tradition of Catch 22 and before that Evelyn Waugh: a meditation on horrors, futility and chaos of War, its purpose and justification and its effect on the individual. For me the main theme of this book is the conflict between the military and the civilian existence, and the ability (or inability) of the individual to reconcile one to the other. This is beautifully exemplified by the narrator, Erez when he returns to Tel Aviv for a furlough and he is unable to deal with life in normal society. First he splits up with his girlfriend for no real reason. Then this beautiful passage:

"At home. An entire nation was there [at beachfront Tel Aviv cafes:] drinking mango and banana smoothies, having a great time. I really hoped I'd feel part of it, flow with the new rules, play along, get used to it. But it didn't happen"

And another after an uncomfortable encounter in a pub:

"I felt like a pear whose insides have been gutted by a worm and there's just the skin left, but it refuses to fall from the tree"

Erez is also a fascinating character: arrogant, cruel, snobbish, racist, sexist and homophobic ... curious - and unusual - that the author should imbue his protagonist with so many negative characteristics.

Another more recent book I am reminded of is "The Things They Carried" by Tim O'Brien which follows a similar theme: a collection of related stories about a platoon of American soldiers in Vietnam - this also explores the conflict between military and civilian life.

Beaufort however has a greater richness, and the language used is at times poetic, humourous, challenging and always eloquent. One wonderful passage is where one of the soldiers is reading from Henry V - Shakespeare's own meditation on war. Ron Leshem (through the mouth of Zitlawi) then takes on the Bard at his own game with his own take on this speech - an impossible task of course, but he does pretty well! [I am curious as to whether the Shakespeare is in English or Hebrew in the original version ????:]

Another prevalent theme of Baufort is the conflict between the religious and the secular within the military setting - which again is something Waugh explored, but for me in Beaufort this is much more powerful because of the intensity of the Judaic religion (cf Christianity). We have Bayliss from a religious home who gradually drops everything whilst at Beaufort, but as soon as he leaves the post to go home to his family his Yarmulka reappears. Then we have the wonderful recurring encounter with Hodya - the religious 16yo blond girl - who surprises us all! Another beautiful section, Hannukah, after Zitlawi has been killed:

"How the hell were we supposed to recite: Blessed are you who has kept us in life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach you on this joyous occasion .. at a time like that..."

The book also effortlessly provides a rationale for Israeli military policy - we are left in no doubt about the justification for the war against terrorism. I was in UK in December at the time of the Israeli invasion of Gaza and daily I had to listen to stories about how evil the Israelis are - both in the media (British sentiment is traditionally - and historically - anti Israel) and from friends and - I hate to say - members of my family. Most of what I heard was based on only partial understanding: an ignorance of the real issues and history, and an inability to see beneath what is on the surface (ie Palestinian children being killed in shopping centres). This is poignantly summed up by Ron Leshem: when the anti-war demonstrator Ashkenazi woman bangs on the soldier's vehicle window and yells "Cannon Fodder!" .. "She was hysterical. It was a pity they couldn't see the whole picture the way we can. Up there in Lebanon the war looks a whole lot better". Interesting choice of word: "better".

The passages dealing the death of the soldiers, River and (even more so) Zitlawi I found intensely moving and emotional. The horror, sadness and traumatic effect of these events on the other soldiers is convincingly portrayed.

There are many wonderful aspects of this book: the eccentric characters and behaviour, the beautiful, paradoxical descriptions of the hilltop location of Beaufort and others too numerous to mention. It is not an easy read - it needs full attention - but is intensely rewarding. The form and structure is excellent. After the initial excitement of the first ten or twenty pages I was concerned that we may run out of ideas, but this is not the case: the tension and interest is maintained through to the last page and various themes are developed expertly.

I found the language used extremely engaging and - as I said before - poetic and poignant. I wonder how much of this is down to the translator?? Two more quotes from sections I enjoyed: "Hatred is an excellent antidote to boredom" (p11) - very true - who hasn't lingered in anger on occasion, as something to hide behind, to avoid having to confront other issues? Also, when describing the landscape around Beaufort: (p13) "If I could only fly along the rivers and over the mountains I would be home already". Wouldn't we all ?!

Two other aspects (author's tricks) which I enjoyed: we are never told the contents of the piece of paper from his gf Erez keeps around his neck (was this changed in the movie??), and I liked the fact that the identity of the dead soldier referred to in the prologue is not revealed until almost the end of the book.

Anuj Dyamanna says

I chose to read this book because of the interesting blurbs telling me that this book was not just about conflict and war, but also about bonding between the soldiers who have to go out to the front lines.

This book is about a commanding officer Erez and his 13 man squad in a place called Beaufort. They have to defend themselves and Beaufort against the Hezbollah while balancing their own fear of being killed. This book has a lot of abusive language and talks about sex and war and friendship between the soldiers at their tour of duty in Beaufort.

I love this book so far. I have not yet finished it as I got it from the library only 6 days ago but I am already liking the book due to its theme of war, which is one of my favorite themes of a book. The uncensored language and the witty jokes made by some of the soldiers in the book made me laugh a lot.

I would recommend this book to warfare fans who would like to read about a soldiers perspective and experience of being in the battlefield.

This book fills the "A book which has been made into a film".

Reva says

I started reading this book when I couldn't find the DVD in the library. Half way through the book I obtained a copy of the movie and viewed it.

A soldier can only do what he is commanded to do - in this case maintain the Israeli location at Beaufort outpost during the first Israel / Lebanon confrontation. The book relates the experiences of a squad stationed at Beaufort. You realize how young soldiers are and that they have to mature under the constant shelling around them and having to follow orders. The death of a soldier and then the command to abandon the fort and return to Israel was upsetting - it gave me an understanding of being an Israeli soldier, following commands, putting your life on hold, the possibility of dying... and realizing the things your friend who has just died won't be able to do anymore.

I recommend this book.

Ralph says

This book, from the cover, to the jacket notes and first chapter, has all the marketing of an anti-war novel. And that makes it one of the most misleading books I've attempted to read. In terms of the war, there's nothing subversive about this book. I've often wondered whether the US was the only country left in the world that still glorified war post-1918 and 45 (you'll never find anything close to ambiguously supporting war in any other country that participated in WWI or WWII), but it looks like I'm proven wrong.

Is it written well? It's not bad in terms of the narrator's voice. Is it worth reading? No, unless you're a war novel fan.

I'm thoroughly disgusted by the misleading marketing of this book.

Ron says

This is the best novel I've read about men in war since Tim O'Brien's "The Things They Carried". In a flood of language (translated effectively from Hebrew to English) we are swept into a world of words describing experiences that have no counterpart in everyday life. The young IDF soldiers stationed inside Lebanon during the 1980s and 90s occupation of that country, led by a nonstop talking narrator, fill the boredom of their lives and block out the terror of their perilous position as a target of Hezbollah artillery by talking, talking, talking, mostly in an argot of their own invention.

The talk is often raunchy, outrageous and absurd, marked with playful gallows humor, while the CO of the squad is constantly concerned with whatever persuasive powers are needed to maintain both discipline and morale, in the face of often incomprehensible military orders and a growing media-covered revolt among

civilians at home against the government's defense policies. These, we discover, are the months, weeks, and days before a final pull-out, as one by one, lives are still being lost.

There is little actual engagement with the enemy, just a hanging on until an end that seems never to come. Meanwhile, the soldiers in the unit struggle to understand what the experience is doing to them as young men on the sudden sharp edge of adulthood. This is a powerful book, neither pro-war nor anti-war, though it will surely disturb those who are strongly one or the other. Regardless of how you view the Israeli government's policies, you will not soon forget this book - if it's even possible.

April Helms says

I tried to read this late last year, so this should go under 2009 attempts. Oh well. I got about halfway through the book before giving up. When you look at a book and are thinking "Ugh, I still have to finish this..." it's time to find another book. The pity is the story itself has potential. The story is told from the point of view of Erez, the squadron leader at Beaufort in the year before Israel's withdraw from South Lebanon in 2000. You would think that such a setting, with all of its politics, intrigue and action, would make for a fast-paced interesting read. But the story meanders and repeats a LOT. It almost feels like stream-of-consciousness, which I'm not a big fan of. I do like the glimpses of what the soldiers go through. I realize a part of the tone of the book is Erez and his squadron having to wait long stretches of time -- but I've seen it better done.

Ilana says

Beaufort reads like a war memoir, down to the grittiest or most tedious details of military life, and I was stunned to learn when I read the author's bio that he himself had not served in Lebanon. Leshem did an amazing job of reporting to create this book.

He also does the neat trick of choosing a narrator who would seem to be the last person I'd sympathize with - - hard-core macho, sexist, racist anti-Arab working class Israeli guy -- and yet builds up a respect and affection for this fellow.

Neta says

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Kevin says

Generation Kill – Israeli Style

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile, "
--- "Henry V", Shakespeare

"Beaufort" offers a gripping fictional account of an Israeli defense force manning a desolate outpost in southern Lebanon. Instead of a GWOT, you have a local war on terror and Hezbollah. Ron Leshem creates a fully believable world of full metal jacket, so realistic you can almost smell the cordite, sweat and blood. The mental stress of fighting "the new war" that rarely offers open pitched battles is drawn brilliantly. "Beaufort" underscores the challenges of any occupation force as it struggles to impose its will on foreign territory – a timely lesson that of course transcends southern Lebanon. The tedium and terror that comprises the soldier's life is depicted in a fully believable way. "Beaufort" launches a full armed assault on your senses as it takes you into a world characterized by days of boredom and minutes of firefight terror. A gripping combat novel!

Dara Salley says

I didn't think this was a terrible book. It just wasn't for me. I'm not really interested in stories about war. This one was a first-person narrative about a war in Lebanon from an Israeli point of view. The book was mildly interesting and I made it through the whole thing. The best parts of the book were not the action sequences, but the reflections of the meaning and brevity of life by the protagonist. The book had many parallels with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and not just because both wars are against Islamic terrorists. In the second half of the book many of the soldiers began to have a breakdown in morale when they started questioning the war. The book was a quick read too, it took me less than a week. I'm glad I borrowed this book from the library rather than buying it.

Mahlon says

Beaufort is a gripping novel about a company of Israeli soldiers serving in the ancient crusader castle of the same name. At the time it was being used by the IDF as an outpost in their war on Hezbollah. Reminiscent of "All Quiet On the Western Front" Leshem's haunting prose illuminates many of the same themes, and gives the reader a window(as much as a book can) into what it was like to serve in Lebanon in the late 90's, and the bonds that only the shared experience of combat can form, reminding us that despite technological advances, the emotional experience of war remains largely the same.

Paul says

Far superior to the already powerful film adaptation I recently saw (thank you BBC4!) - The main protagonist - Liraz - a young infantry Lieutenant, finds himself in a position of command at the remote IDF outpost atop the hill at Beaufort - a medieval Crusader fortress ruin - in turn of the century south Lebanon. It is the weeks leading up to Israel's final withdrawal from this front. After a lengthy period of disillusionment and despair at the regular losses for those 'back home' starts to pervade the surroundings at Beaufort, young Liraz's own certainties start to evaporate just as the increasing isolation is felt in the fog and the rain... He

only wants to lead his men the way he knows is right, and circumstances are fast overtaking him. "They say we took this mountain for nothing, that we didn't need it, all those who died here...took it for nothing??"

Ron Leshem's writing has the dialogue and the description to set the scene with authenticity. The men of the warren-like 'underground on a mountain top' outpost are all waiting for something. For leave, for their girlfriend, for their dreams of breakfast, for the end? The book has the feel of a thriller, as the tension rises and closes in... Quite an intense read.

Gal says

This book is full of shallow caricatures drawn by the typical leftist Tel Avivian. There's Rambo-like knucklehead that disobeys orders due to anger management issues, An Ars that is extremely unintelligent but has a golden heart, religious people that are conflicted about it and of course endless idolization of the "thoughtful" representative of the Israeli far left. All the characters might as well appear in Eretz Nehederet sketch. Moreover, the voice of the author comes through the again and again, breaking character and ruining the flow of the story.
