Pumpkinflowers: A Soldier's Story
Synopsis

A book about young men transformed by war, written by a veteran whose dazzling literary gifts gripped my attention from the first page to the last. —The Wall Street Journal

Friedman’s sober and striking new memoir . . . [is] on a par with Tim O’Brien’s The Things They Carried — its Israeli analog. —The New York Times Book Review

It was just one small hilltop in a small, unnamed war in the late 1990s, but it would send out ripples that are still felt worldwide today. The hill, in Lebanon, was called the Pumpkin; flowers was the military code word for casualties. Award-winning writer Matti Friedman re-creates the harrowing experience of a band of young Israeli soldiers charged with holding this remote outpost, a task that would change them forever, wound the country in ways large and small, and foreshadow the unwinnable conflicts the United States would soon confront in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. Pumpkinflowers is a reckoning by one of those young soldiers now grown into a remarkable writer. Part memoir, part reportage, part history, Friedman’s powerful narrative captures the birth of today’s chaotic Middle East and the rise of a twenty-first-century type of war in which there is never a clear victor and media images can be as important as the battle itself. Raw and beautifully rendered, Pumpkinflowers will take its place among classic war narratives by George Orwell, Philip Caputo, and Tim O’Brien. It is an unflinching look at the way we conduct war today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Matti Friedman’s PUMPKINFLOWERS is perhaps the best war memoir I’ve read this year, about his role in a "little war" I’d never even heard of. Friedman, Toronto-born, emigrated back to his parents’
native Israel after high school, where, like all Israeli youths of a certain age, he was drafted into the IDF in 1996. And like many of his male peers, he was sent "up the line" to serve in a small border post along the border with Lebanon, where the two countries had been engaged in a sporadic shooting and shelling war since the early 80s. The outpost was code-named Pumpkin. Wounded soldiers were 'flowers.' Dead soldiers were 'oleanders.' Hence the title. Although most of us here in the west were largely oblivious to that conflict between the IDF and Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon, Friedman shows us, one brief, terse chapter at a time, how 'his' war was actually the beginning of the hit-and-run terrorist wars of today, waged by Al Qaeda, ISIS, or whatever you wish to call that shadowy enemy that continues to spread terror with sneak attacks not only in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Turkey, but also in Europe and even in the U.S. Because Hezbollah was already using IED's and roadside bombs, and, by the end of the 90s, even suicide bombers began showing up in the marketplaces of larger Israeli cities like Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Through extensive research and interviews, Friedman traces the history of the Pumpkin and the young men who served at the remote post over a period of more than fifteen years, many of them maimed, mutilated and killed. He begins with the story of a young would-be writer named Avi, a dreamer and an idealist who recognized early that the army has "no room for innocence ...
as to the purpose and meaning behind those deaths.

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