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News to Choice:

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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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These are two highly topical books, dealing with terrorist violence and both personal and establishment responses to it, which would reward shared reading and discussion.

In **Death or Glory Boys**, an army recruitment unit visits a school and a group of articulate teenagers decide to give the induction process a try. Sarah and Phil are becoming attracted to each other as the story starts, but their army experience deepens the conflict between Sarah's enthusiasm for a military life, and Phil's romantic pacifism. In the meantime, a maverick terrorist is prowling the vicinity, planting civilian targeted bombs without warning.

This is a serious book about difficult issues, and like Breslin's Carnegie medal winning **Whispers in the Graveyard**, it is skilfully paced and well researched. However, I felt that its implicit enthusiasm for martial paraphernalia, ranging from spit 'n' polish and square bashing to neatly clustered bullet holes and the chilling arcana of high tech slaying, stymies its attempts at debate. Phil is given some good lines about how language is corrupted by euphemisms for violence, but his pacifism flakes as his 'officer qualities' emerge. And to end a chapter with the unchallenged declaration '... in the army the training isn't totally about war. It is also about peace' is a cop out.

Broken Bridge is set in Israel and the occupied territories. A Jewish Canadian child accompanying his Israeli cousin to a kibbutz is stabbed to death by a Palestinian extremist in a suburb of Jerusalem. The event embroils the entire family in a seething Laocoonian turmoil of anguish and guilt. The younger Israelis struggle against, or succumb to, racist fury against the oppressed Palestinians. The Canadian family are dragged apart by conflicting national loyalties. The older idealists who pioneered the Jewish state see their dream foundering in blood. Meanwhile, one of the fugitive killers rediscovers his cryptic links to a member of his victim's family.

This is a complex and deeply moving book, and to appreciate it fully, you should first read *One More River*, published and set twenty-five years earlier, to which it is a sequel. However, the novel stands on its own as an heroic attempt to represent even-handedly the tensions and passions underlying events in Palestine, and to understand the potential for violence which lurks in both the soldier and the civilian, the terrorist and the target.

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