

The Wasted Vigil by Nadeem Aslam.  
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The Wasted Vigil is set in Afghanistan at the current time, and focuses on the interwoven lives of a retired Englishman, Marcus Caldwell, living in the foothills of the Tora Bora mountains, bereaved of his wife and daughter and searching for his lost grandson; David Town, a former CIA operative, jewel merchant and lover of Marcus' daughter Zameen; Lara, a Russian woman searching for news of the fate of her brother, a Russian soldier who fought in Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion and Casa, a young Muslim following the jihadist path.

The novel has a terrible beauty to it, and Nadeem Aslam brings the surroundings to life in a most vivid way so that the reader can almost feel, hear and smell the events and incidents that are described.

But A Wasted Vigil also carries an unspoken dread that infuses the story and the lives of its characters; dread of the perverted violence of the warlords, dread of the twisted Islamic vision of the nihilistic Taliban, dread of finding out unbearable truths about the past, dread of the implications of US realpolitik, dread of the history of a benighted but beautiful land.

A Wasted Vigil possesses a cloying and claustrophobic quality which will increasingly oppress the reader, and as this takes effect s/he will get some sense of what it must be like to live and work in Afghanistan today, in a society founded on violence, paranoia and fear, suffused by an unremitting sense of foreboding and hopelessness.

It is a brilliant novel – but it will leave you feeling sad and raw.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh