

Friendly Fire by A. B. Yehoshua. Halban Publishers Ltd 2008.

Alef Bet Yehoshua's latest book takes place over the festival of Chanukkah in Israel and Africa. In Israel, Amotz Ya-ari, a lift engineer and pater familias, fills his time with frantic activity both personal and professional while his wife Daniela travels alone to Africa to visit her widowed brother-in-law and attempt to reconnect with the spirit of her departed sister.

Each chapter shifts from one country to the other, and the juxtaposition of the different experiences of the two makes for both energy and tension. Hanging over the entire story is a death, not that of Ya-ari's sister-in-law but rather that of her son, his nephew, killed by friendly fire while on a military operation against suspected terrorists. This death has blighted the lives of both families, affecting them collectively and individually, and in the course of the story its circumstances are explained.

Yehoshua is a genius of a story teller, and he is at his most subtle best in Friendly Fire. This is a book replete with pathos and humour, vivid depictions of Israeli life and the pressure exerted on its citizens by their continuing state of semi-war with their neighbours and the Palestinians. It is also a wonderful portrayal of the dynamics of a family, between the patriarchal generation of Amotz' father down to that of his youngest grandchild, and it throws up some delicious surprises!

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh