

The Samaritan's Secret by Matt Rees.  
Atlantic Books 2009.

Matt Rees is a Welsh-born foreign correspondent who has been working in the Middle East for many years. Fluent in Hebrew and Arabic he is a close observer of Israeli and Palestinian affairs and has spent six years as the Jerusalem bureau chief for Time magazine.

The main protagonist of The Samaritan's Secret is Omar Yussef, an unlikely sleuth who teaches in a UN school in Bethlehem. In Nablus to celebrate a friend's wedding he becomes involved with skulduggery and murder around the ancient Samaritan community in the city, which then develops into conflict between Fatah and Hamas factions there.

In the midst of this violent imbroglio, Yussef steers a steady and courageous path, in the course of which he solves the principal murder and aids a World Bank employee in recovering some of the salted-away millions of the former Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

Matt Rees clearly knows the world of which he writes, and his dialogue and situations have an eminently authentic ring to them. As well as being a good story it is refreshing to read a novel set in Israel/Palestine that doesn't have the predictable enemies battling each other!

This is the latest of three Omar Yussef tales to be written by Matt Rees, and though it is the first one that I have read it will not be the last.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh