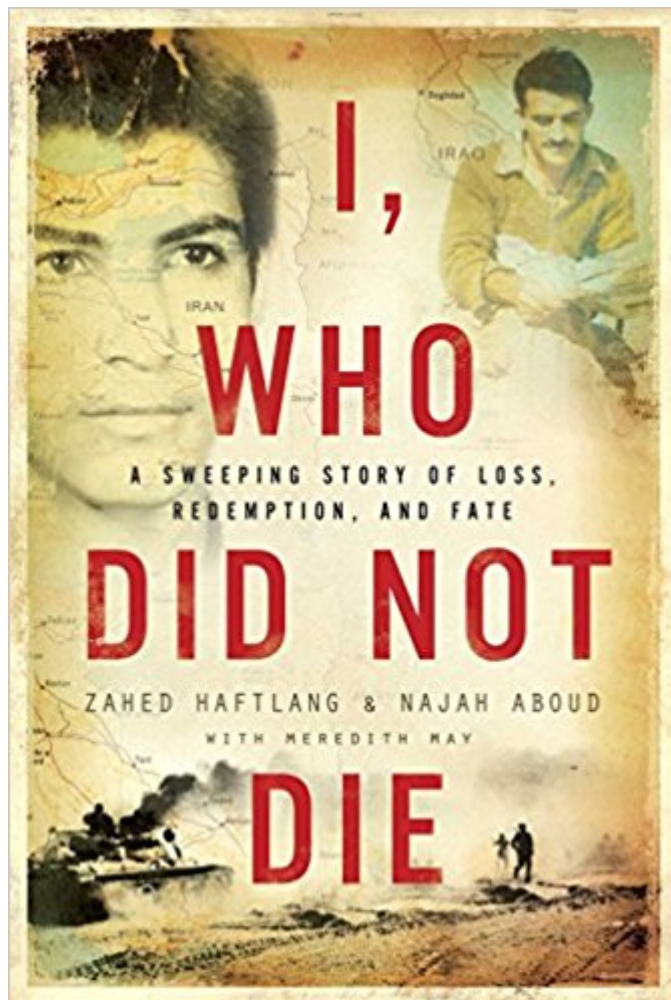


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I, Who Did Not Die



Synopsis

Khorramshahr, Iran, May 1982—It was the bloodiest battle of one of the most brutal wars of the twentieth century, and Najah, a twenty-nine-year-old wounded Iraqi conscript, was face to face with a thirteen-year-old Iranian child soldier who was ordered to kill him. Instead, the boy committed an astonishing act of mercy. It was an act that decades later would save his own life. This is a remarkable story. It is gut-wrenching, essential, and astonishing. It is a war story. A love story. A page-turner of vast moral dimensions. An eloquent and haunting act of witness to horrors beyond grimmest fiction, and a thing of towering beauty. More importantly, it is a story that must be told, and a richly textured view into an overlooked conflict and misunderstood region. This is the great untold story of the children and young men whose lives were sacrificed at the whim of vicious dictators and pointless, barbaric wars. Little has been written of the Iran-Iraq war, which was among the most brutal conflicts of the twentieth century, one fought with chemical weapons, ballistic missiles, and cadres of child soldiers. The numbers involved are staggering: All told, it claimed 700,000 lives—200,000 Iraqis, and 500,000 Iranians. Young men of military service age—eighteen and above in Iraq, fifteen and above in Iran—died in the greatest numbers. 80,000 Iranian child soldiers were killed, mostly between the ages of sixteen and seventeen. The two countries spent a combined 1.1 trillion dollars fighting the war. Rarely does this kind of reportage succeed so powerfully as literature. More rarely still does such searingly brilliant literature fit to stand beside Remarque, Hemingway, and O'Brien—emerge from behind “enemy” lines. But Zahed, a child, and Najah, a young restaurateur, are rare men—not just survivors, but masterful, wondrously gifted storytellers. Written with award-winning journalist Meredith May, this is literature of a very high order, set down with passion, urgency, and consummate skill. This story is an affirmation that, in the end, it is our humanity that transcends politics and borders and saves us all.

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Customer Reviews

"Their tale is quite remarkable . . . a fascinating and ultimately uplifting exploration of cultures unknown to many." Kirkus Reviews "To understand the rage in the Middle East, history should be told by individuals who lived it. I, Who Did Not Die is gut-wrenching, essential, shocking, and beautifully told. It is a rare examination of the absurdity of a war fought by children and young men who were victims of the brutal dictators they were forced to serve. This powerful tale of two men whose lives collide on the battlefield shows that acts of mercy are the ultimate triumph of compassion over hate. Absolutely required reading!" Afschineh Latifi, author of Even After All This Time "This is a miracle tale a vivid and wrenching story told by two soldiers who opposed each other on the battlefield, but through grace, courage, and an astonishing twist of fate, ultimately manage to save each other." Sara Corbett, author of A House In The Sky "The words come alive like a movie, like being transported inside The Bridge on the River Kwai, Battle for Haditha, or Three Kings. Everyone, regardless of skin color, ethnicity, or religion, should read this book to vaccinate themselves against human ignorance, religious intolerance and political manipulation." Pierre Razoux, author of The Iran-Iraq War

Zahed Haftlang was just thirteen when he joined Iran's Basij paramilitary, where he spent six years fighting in the war. After capture by the Iraqi army, he spent nearly two and half years as a POW. He eventually became a merchant sailor and traveled worldwide. He is now raising two children with his wife in North Vancouver, British Columbia, where he owns an auto repair shop. Najah Aboud was brought up in a middle-class Iraqi family and was conscripted at eighteen, serving eight years in the army. Afterwards, he managed a falafel restaurant for two years, but at age twenty-eight was called back when the Iran-Iraq War broke out in 1980. After two years of fighting, he was captured and spent the next seventeen years suffering in Iranian prisons as a POW. When he was finally released in 1999, he emigrated to Canada, where his brother lives. He owns a moving company in Vancouver. Meredith May spent sixteen years as a feature writer at The San Francisco Chronicle, where her 2004 narrative series on a war-wounded Iraqi boy won the PEN

USA Literary Award for Journalism and was shortlisted for the Pulitzer Prize.

This is a terrific read written in an engaging style so that I flew through the chapters. The fact that it's based on all true information made it even more compelling. It's the kind of book that when you're finished, you believe in the SPIRIT of the world and get a sense that "it's all going to be okay". I very much enjoyed it.

Najah was an Iraqi soldier and Zahed was an Iranian boy soldier. Their meeting on the battlefield of Iraq/Iran war changed both their lives. Years later they both are in a clinic in Vancouver, Canada. What are the odds? They start talking and finally realize when and how they first met. I hate comparing books, but Meredith's book affected me just like Rebecca Skloot's book 'The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks'. Both are extraordinary non-fiction books written so beautifully and thoughtfully, one forgets that these aren't fictionalized tales. Both tell the stories in straightforward and no-nonsense ways. 'I, Who Did Not Die' is a very important and powerful book.

Author Meredith May has written a moving portrayal of two men whose lives were forever altered by the experience, trauma, and horror of war...a protracted armed conflict that claimed countless lives including innocent men, women and children. This book evoked so many emotions as Zahed & Najah delved into their lives and the unimaginable conditions that they had endured and would ultimately survive. There were some tender moments when the men spoke of their loves, their families and their lives in Iraq & Iran, respectively. Some levity was brought to this gripping story as well as the men recounted some humorous times when life was "normal" before the war heated up. In the end I really felt like I had come to know these two remarkable human beings and the kinship that will serve as a bond for the rest of their lives. Author May did a superb job of presenting the reader with a skillful and eloquent account of both Zahed Haftlang and Najah Aboud and the critical moment that brought them together. Highly recommended!

What makes men survive years of torture as prisoners of war? What keeps them going when life is at its darkest? What lessons can you as the reader take from their journeys? One of the best books I read in a long time!!!

Horrific, humanity, hope, heartwarming. I never would normally read a book on this topic but I saw the story in the news and knew I had to. I was not disappointed! Although the information I learned

was hard to digest, it's the for the two men, a truth that I am grateful they shared in such detail. I am glad I knew the backstory before going on however as it gave me hope for the ending. Overall, an unforgettable story.

This book is an amazing rendition of the life stories of men whose lives were shaped by the Iran-Iraq war - it is an important book rendered by a talented author who makes both the men and their war deeply affecting.

An Unbelievable Story! I could not put down the book. Its a story about humanity's ultimate triumph, told through the experience of two soldiers on the opposite side of the national, ideological divide!

Powerfully written story about the horrors of war (will we ever learn?) counter balanced by the strength of forgiveness and love. Meredith May captures the depth of each man's soul in telling their stories.

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