

The Angel

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CHAIN EFFECT

North London author Jemma Wayne talks social politics, her new conflict ridden book and her father's ever present influence

Words RACHEL MANTOCK

Following in her musician father Jeff Wayne's footsteps, author and journalist Jemma Wayne has let conflict and disaster around the world inspire her novels. Growing up in

a creative family gave Wayne the open-minded outlook she possesses today, allowing her to weave current, absolute realism into the landscape of her stories.

Unlike many parents who try to push their children into more sensible professions, Wayne's were always encouraging of her creative writing, her father in particular.

'I was always buried in a book, and right from a very young age writing was my means of expression, as well as cathartic exercise,' she recalls. 'I think my passion and talent for writing was innate.'

Of her father's success and influence, she adds: 'Having him as an example gave me both the confidence to believe that success was possible, and also the insight into the hard work, discipline and challenges that anyone in this kind of industry is likely to face.'

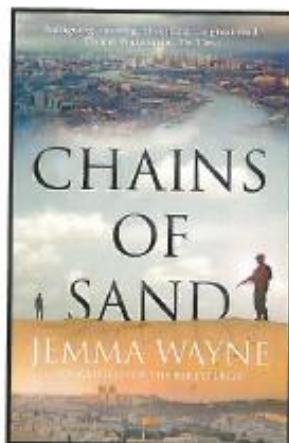
Also working as a freelance journalist, Wayne's fiction ideas are often sparked by writing a

journalistic piece about something she finds deeply moving. She thinks that 'journalists are typically curious about the wider world', attributing the social and political aspects of her fictional work to this


curiosity. Speaking of the importance of exploring the effect social and political forces have on characters within fiction, she says: 'I am fascinated by the way in which the universal affects the personal, and I think that fiction is a powerful means by which to explore events we may otherwise experience only as headlines and mere statistics.'

Her latest book, *Chains of Sand*, is the accumulation of ideas Wayne had been playing with for a number of years, but 'the real trigger' was the conflict between Israel and Hamas in 2014. In the wake of this fierce cataclysm, Wayne observed 'a new kind of triumphalism from people on both sides'. The Islington resident expands by saying: 'Conflict in

this region is always polarising, but I began to witness horrendous anti-Semitism. I also saw some Jewish friends respond to the tragedy in Gaza – not with the compassion they would usually show – but



Chains of Sand is Wayne's most recent novel, set amid the Israel-Gaza dissension



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The Israeli-Palestine conflict provides a backdrop to the book

The Dome of the Rock in the Old City of Jerusalem holds a special significance for both Islam and Judaism, two religions that collide in *Chains of Sand*



with impassioned justifications about why Israel was "right".

She describes these intense and polar opposite views in relation to the crisis as 'a black and white framework, in which we lose all empathy, all ability to acknowledge the narrative of others', highlighting it as 'a dangerous place to be'. In her book, Wayne wanted to 'explore the grey' that had been lost in discussions in the wake of this tragedy.

In the novel, the characters include a 26-year-old veteran of the IDF (Israel Defence Force) who has five murders under his belt, an apathetic British Jew, a young Gazan girl trapped under rubble, an Iraqi mother who reads coffee cups, a modern Muslim advertising executive, an Israeli artist and a feminist writer. All of these characters are essential to Wayne's 'show all angles' approach. 'Amidst these people is where we see the grief and longing, the hope and fear, the humanity, and all of the colliding "truths" that exist on both sides,' she explains.

At the negotiating tables, we see men. But on all sides, it is often the women who suffer the consequences most

Currently, given the rise of fifth wave feminism, Wayne is drawn to issues surrounding women, particularly those in conflict situations, having touched on this in *Chains of Sand*.

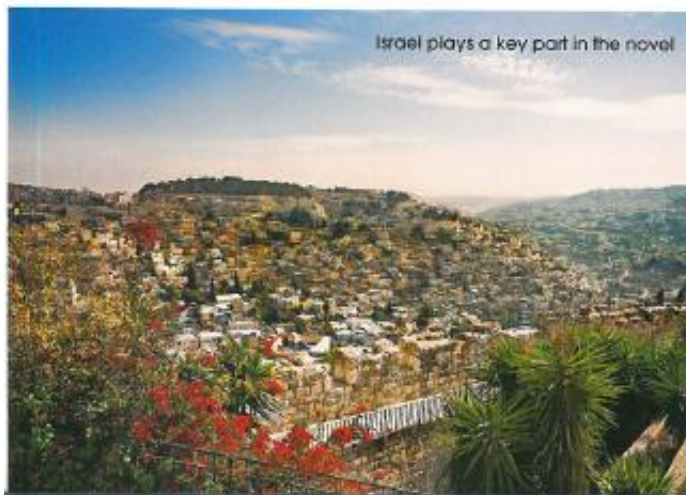
'At the negotiating tables, we see men. But on all sides, it is often the women who suffer the consequences most,' she says.

Immigration is also a big topic of interest for her, being one of the main driving forces behind *Chains of Sand*. 'The flow of humanity is endlessly intriguing to me,' she reflects. 'People often emigrate during a moment of great hope or acute despair. It is a huge issue for our time and also great dramatic fodder for highly emotional stories.'

Away from writing, Wayne likes to explore her home city. She loves 'the mixture of urban grit and green space' as well as 'the history blended with modernity, the culture, the diversity, the vivacity'.

She says: 'There are many great cities across the world, but in London, there is this ease of confidence, making it the perfect setting for a multitude of fictional tales. One need only walk down the street or sit in a café to catch the scent of an idea.'

Little wonder, then, that she is already working on her next novel.



Israel plays a key part in the novel