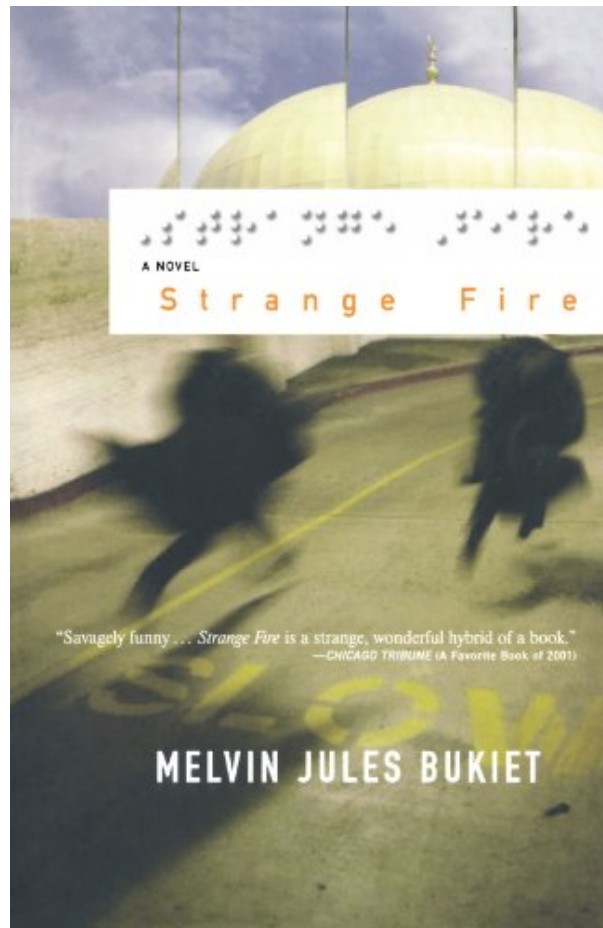
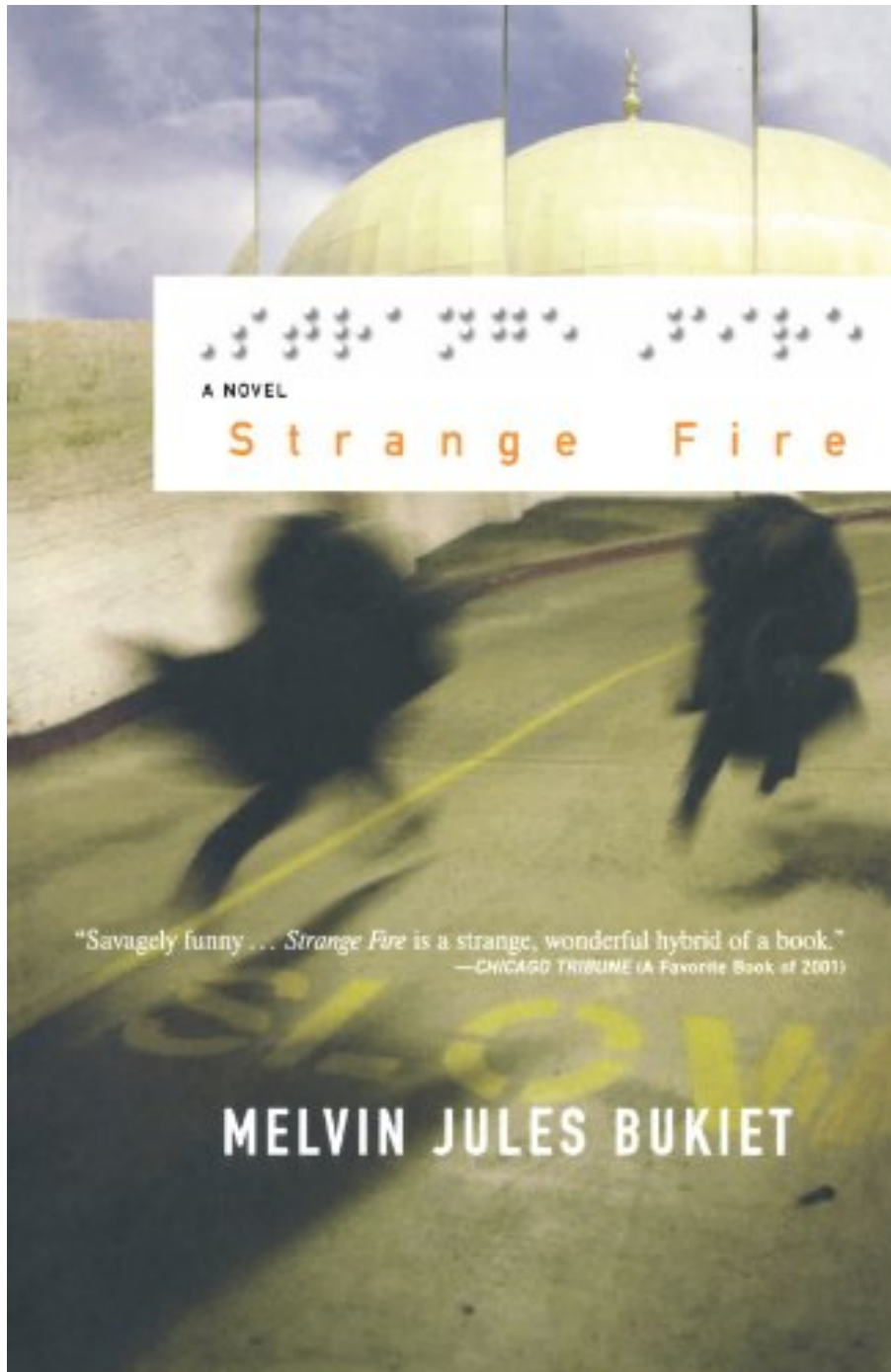


# STRANGE FIRE: A NOVEL BY MELVIN JULES BUKIET



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From Publishers Weekly

Prescient, more or less it doesn't take a prophet to forecast cyclical violence in the Middle East Bukiet's witty, engrossing novel anticipates the current resurgence of Palestinian-Israeli conflict, chronicling the derailment of the peace process after a conservative victory in the Knesset. Like an Israeli *All the Kings Men* recast as a thriller, the tale is told by a political aide Nathan Kazakov, a blind ex-POW, Russian immigrant, former poet, Lebanon invasion veteran, semiclosed homosexual and now speechwriter to Simon ben Levi, the charismatic right-wing prime minister (more in the mold of Benjamin Netanyahu than Ariel Sharon). Making an obvious reference to Yitzhak Rabin's assassination, the novel opens with a gun shot: a Jewish settler fires the pistol, and it is Nathan who gets a bullet in the ear. This brush with death heightens Nathan's disenchantment with Simon's politics, impelling his investigation into the assassin's real target and prompting him to search for Simon's estranged son, the enigmatic archeologist Gabriel. Bukiet (*Signs and Wonders*) keeps a steady level of suspense simply by capitalizing on Nathan's blindness. After encounters with colorful characters like Gita Mamoun, a philanthropic female Palestinian arms mogul and a fanatical rabbi called Moshe X, Nathan discovers a labyrinthine conspiracy code-named Strange Fire, which somehow involves Gabriel. In a region as convoluted as the Middle East, conspiracies are as central as ordinary politics, and it's almost a shame when all is finally revealed after the fascinating deployment of so many Red Sea herrings. (May)Forecast: Call this a hopped-up literary novel or an offbeat thriller either way, it defies genre labels. Mainstream thriller readers probably won't bite, but fans of clever, eccentric amateur detectives and those who follow Israeli news closely (the book will be promoted in Jewish publications) will appreciate the hero's wiles. An author tour to New York, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., should help those readers find the book.

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"Savagely funny....Never was Jewish wit put to better or more urgent use."?Chicago Tribune, a Favorite Book of 2001

Blind, homosexual, Russian émigré speechwriter Nathan Kazakov has enough problems even before his left ear is obliterated by a bullet presumably meant for the Israeli prime minister. Determined to solve the mystery, Nathan begins exploring a web of conspiracies involving messianic orthodox settlers, Arab terrorists, and the Israeli secret service. Was the bullet intended for Nathan after all? or perhaps for the prime minister's son Gabriel, an archaeologist who shuns his father's politics? One trail leads to Leviticus, another beneath the Temple Mount. *Strange Fire* is "a stunning literary achievement" (Miami Herald) fueled by Bukiet's singular imagination. A Washington Post Book World 2001 Rave, a Chicago Tribune Favorite Book of the Year, and a Booklist Editors' Choice. "Corrupt, violent, zigzagging atmosphere...a raucous vituperative attack on every kind of political hypocrisy."?Los Angeles Times Book Review

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Good writing, movie-like plot

By A Customer

Bukiet writes well about blindness, conveying a keen sense of his protagonists' reliance upon others and his other senses in order to stay alive. This could have been worked well into a parable about the Middle East--how the religious ecosystem, with one holy place on top of another, demands a forever-uncertain reliance on others. This seems to have been completely ignored, however, in favor of a roller-coaster political thriller. It was an enjoyable book, but one that a) only revealed a superficial understanding of the religious depths of conflict in the Middle East and often resorted to caricatures rather than true examination and b) seemed to dumb itself down to find a more common-ground audience.

Bukiet is a very good writer and is capable of more.

1 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Great characters and excellent writing

By M.A.

So many books that are out there contain the same plot over and over again. It was refreshing to come across a book with an unusual protagonist and an original plot. The writing was also quite good. My only complaint is that the book seemed to go downhill a bit towards the end. There's a rape scene which just doesn't make any sense, and we lose our compassion for what had been a sympathetic character. Finally, the end (you notice that I didn't give away any plot points at all) boils down to a hackneyed action sequence with the hero saving the day.

All in all, however, it was nice to read a book that didn't fit the usual mode.

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Maybe Deserves a 3 star, all so subjective

By A Customer

Melvin Bukeit is a talented writer, no questions on that score. In "Strange Fire" what bothered me was Bukiet's cavalier attitude towards his locale: the mideast. His agility and cleverness with language miss the beat here. He's not a writer who creates caring toward his bizarre (in good and bad sense) characters, nor about their situations. I think he needs to amplify his ability with words with heart. That is just one man's honest opinion. Because, without heart and soul, for lack of better words, the plot isn't intimately gripping.

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