

# Soldier Girl

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By **Karen Iris Tucker**

**I**n the comic-book frame, we can see the heroine: a squat, somewhat disheveled contrast to the smooth, self-possessed Israeli soldiers by whom she is surrounded. Her eyes, etched with ink dashes, nevertheless betray both vulnerability and alienation. Peering out of a pouchy Ashkenazic face, they seek out friendship, sex and acceptance from her Sephardic companions.

The girl is a stand-in for Miriam Libicki, a 25-year-old woman who grew up in a Modern Orthodox Jewish family in Columbus, Ohio, and who is the writer and artist of the autobiographical comic book series, "Jobnik!" In it, Libicki chronicles her experiences as an enlistee in the Israel Defense Forces, casting tales of torpedoed romance, the invariable emotional turmoil from those relationships and coming of age — all set against the backdrop of the second intifada. Libicki has since completed her tour of duty and has "shacked up," as she puts it, with a Buddhist — now her fiance — in Canada, where she has thus far penned five issues of the ongoing "Jobnik!" series.

In the series, which is available at comic stores and through her Web site ([realgonegirl.com](http://realgonegirl.com)), Libicki faithfully relays wince-worthy moments of her struggle to acclimate herself among her IDF peers. There are mercilessly awkward sex scenes; Libicki experiences everyday indignities as a low-level file clerk classified by the army as "excessively emotional," and the story, while politically neutral, conveys the high price exacted by Israeli-Palestinian violence. The second issue of "Jobnik!" documents, frame by frame, the news spectacle involving a 12-year-old Palestinian boy named Mohammed Aldura, whose

death by gunfire as his father attempted to shield him was caught on videotape in September 2000.

"I don't have the answers to anything," Libicki explained in a recent interview. Despite this neutrality, Libicki, who identified herself as an Israeli American, says she experienced some anti-Israeli flak when she returned to the United States and attended Seattle University in Washington for a year. One student anonymously wrote hostile messages on the marker board of her dorm-room door. And her parents, who now live in Israel, often worry that their daughter might be forced into some verbal jousting among the largely liberal ranks at comic-book conventions — a concern that only increased during recent events in Lebanon.

"People have asked, 'What's your opinion [of the incursion]?'" Libicki said. "And I say, 'Oh, I think it's lousy,' without specifying. That seems to be good enough for most people."

Libicki is a bit more brash and pointed in her illustrated essay, "Towards a Hot Jew: The Israeli Soldier as Fetish Object," which she wrote last year. In it, she compares the popular images of the effete and neurotic North American Jewish man and his manicured JAP companion with that of sinewy, sandal-wearing and MC-16-toting IDF soldiers, many of whom are barely out of their teens.

Libicki captures the steamy culture of the latter in "Jobnik!" — though the book's black-and-white illustration deliberately departs from the highly stylized superhero comics, which Libicki says tend to depict the fairer sex as "six feet tall with giant breasts. Or, the manga Japanese comics in which the women are tiny-thin and have no feet. I was rebelling against that."

Absent these otherworldly flourishes, "Jobnik!" grounds the reader in moral questions of war and Libicki's excruciating loneliness. At the close of the fifth issue, Libicki still had a year left of IDF service, leaving plenty of plotline for her to work her disarming guilelessness into several more issues.

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