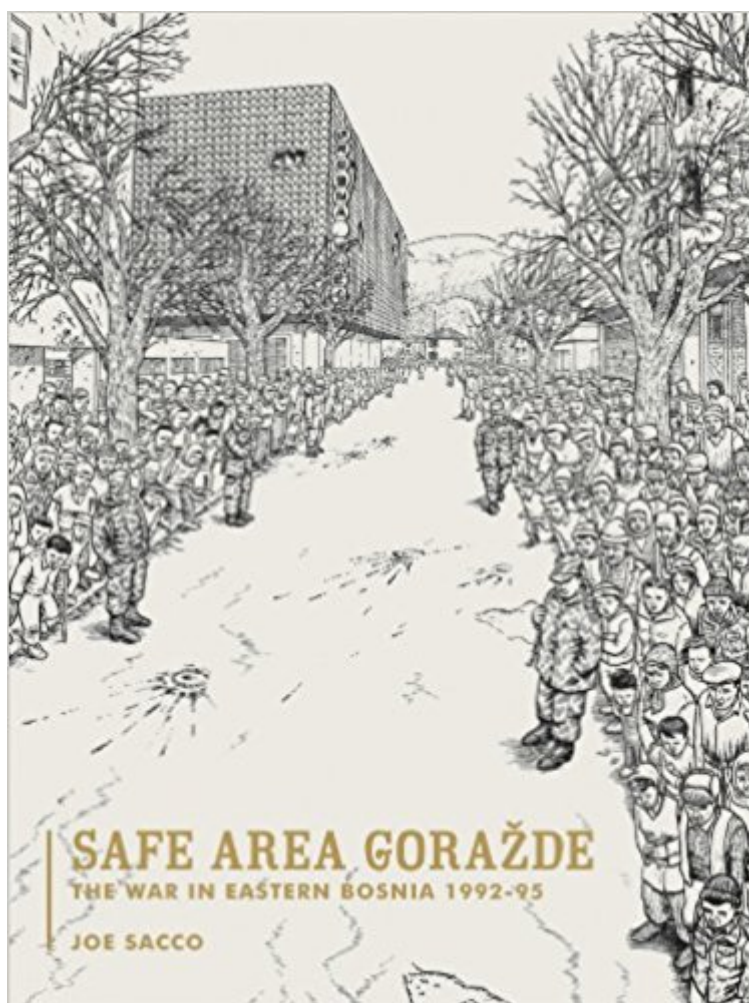


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Safe Area Gorazde: The War In Eastern Bosnia 1992-1995



Synopsis

The winner of the 2001 Eisner Award for Best New Graphic Album. Sacco spent five months in Bosnia in 1996, immersing himself in the human side of life during wartime, researching stories that are rarely found in conventional news coverage, emerging with this astonishing first-person account. Praised by The New York Times, Brill's Content and Publishers Weekly, Safe Area Gorazde is the long-awaited and highly sought after 240-page look at war in the former Yugoslavia. Sacco (the critically-acclaimed author of Palestine) spent five months in Bosnia in 1996, immersing himself in the human side of life during wartime, researching stories that are rarely found in conventional news coverage. The book focuses on the Muslim-held enclave of Gorazde, which was besieged by Bosnian Serbs during the war. Sacco lived for a month in Gorazde, entering before the Muslims trapped inside had access to the outside world, electricity or running water. Safe Area Gorazde is Sacco's magnum opus and with it he is poised to become one of America's most noted journalists. The book features an introduction by Christopher Hitchens, political columnist for The Nation and Vanity Fair.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"[Demonstrates] how brilliantly comics can serve as reportage." - The New York Times
"Graphic in every sense of the term, Sacco's account of everyday life in a city under siege puts one of the twentieth century's least understood catastrophes in perspective; it's the best argument around for comics as a journalistic medium." - GQ
"Joe Sacco is an engaging and direct writer, but above all, he is a good journalist."

Comics just happen to be the outlet for his reportage... [he is] a master of the unique medium of comics journalism. - William Jones, Graphic Novel Reporter
“Published soon after the conflict that it documents, *Safe Area Gorazde* is an intense reading experience and an active call for the condemnation of tribal and international leaders who put politics ahead of humanity. - Suzette Chan, *Sequential Tart*

Joe Sacco lives in Portland, Oregon. He is the author of many acclaimed graphic novels, including *Palestine*, *Safe Area Gorazde*, *But I Like It*, *Notes from a Defeatist*, *The Fixer*, *War's End*, and *Footnotes in Gaza*. Christopher Hitchens (1949–2011) is the author of *God Is Not Great*, *Hitch-22*, and *Why Orwell Matters*.

First, the bad news: "*Safe Area Goradze*" is bleak, depressing and unrelentingly sad. It is the true tale of the horrible suffering of the Muslim population of the ever-so-ironically designated "Safe Area" of Goradze, a city in the former country of Yugoslavia during that nation's recent civil war and breakup. The combination of the author's drawings and prose work together to tell the gruesome story of a real life hell on Earth in brutal, unflinching, unblinking detail. It's the graphic novel equivalent of "*Schindler's List*". If you buy this book, steel yourself. It's not an easy read. Nevertheless, I think Joe Sacco is a genius who is to be commended for telling a story that cries out to be told. I'm sure his editors warned him that this story was not one that would be a big seller. The arcane politics of the former Yugoslavia, which Sacco does a masterful job of explaining, don't interest many people. And the subject matter is depressing and gruesome in the extreme. Nevertheless, he wrote and illustrated the graphic novel, and Fantagraphics Books is to be applauded for publishing it. Hopefully, this work will serve as the historical record of the awful torments inflicted upon human beings in a particular time and place, leaving wounds physical and psychic that will take generations to heal.

As a comic book nerd I've long enjoyed Joe Sacco's amazing work. Superb journalism presented in comic book format, he is an artist who reminds us of all of the promise in the format. I bought *Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992-1995* at my local comic book store because I am in a period of learning more about the Bosnian War and it was by Joe Sacco and I could afford it at the time. I read it following my read of *Logavina Street* by Barbara Demick and it was a great companion piece. Where Demick's book is all about Sarajevo, Sacco's is about conditions in *Safe Area Gorazde*, a small place that was under unrelenting siege from 1992 to 1995.

Sacco gives a great deal of background information about the conflict while at the same time humanizing it through format and the eyes of the people who lived through the siege (including his own). Each in their own put themselves in the center of the stories they're telling - an acknowledgment of the myth of objectivity. I've read a lot of history and a lot of historical fiction and when the words "siege warfare" come up I tend to think about castles and knights and big walls and the people inside eating their horses. *Safe Area Gorazde* taught me a lot about modern siege warfare and opened my eyes further to a story I have neglected. It is simple to understand why Mr. Sacco won the Eisner Award for this book. Brilliant, heart-stopping, and terribly sad this is a work of genius - highly recommended.

In chapter four of his *The "New Journalism" Revisited*, Rocco Versaci explains that to many New Journalists "all "truth" is mediated, and we ignore this fact at the expense of our critical faculties" (115). He further contends that many new journalists attempt to acknowledge and consequently overcome the biases of journalism by involving themselves directly in their narrative frameworks, thereby "flaunting their subjectivity" (114). Joe Sacco's 2001 *Safe Area Gorazde* is an example of new journalism wherein the author places himself firmly within the story and examines all levels of truth, relaying many voices in non-linear fashion to perhaps encapsulate the skewed emotional ups and downs of war. Sacco, it seems, is not searching for a central truth with which to unify his experiences in Bosnia. In the book's prologue (1-2), he is approached by a man who promises to reveal to him the "Real Truth" of the war. Sacco consciously avoids the man and he is never mentioned again. Instead, Sacco chooses to exemplify the facet of new journalism which Versaci finds most enduring: "the foregrounding of the individual perspective as an organizing consciousness" (111) except that Sacco relates many consciousnesses, and the result is less than ideally organized. Instead of an organizer, Sacco acts as mediator in *Safe Area Gorazde*, creating a vivid patchwork of wartime experience by many people he meets, including his principle guide Edin whose trips to Grebak to procure food for his family showcase tenacity in the face of starvation (136) and a gaggle of girls Sacco deems "The Silly Girls" who have one wish, for a pair of "genuine American Levi jeans" (56). They are ultimately disillusioned when the jeans they receive are "not originals" (193) however, displaying another facet of wartime fatigue. Elsewhere, Sacco uses his characters as narrators--sharing their war experiences which are then related to the reader in disturbing detail. When a man relates his terror crossing a river to safety on page 110, his story appears in quotations, as though he is speaking not only to Sacco but to reader, the author cutting back to the man in the narrative's present tense as he stares straight off the page (111),

continuously reminding us that we are viewing this account from one subjective consciousness, not from a journalist intent on applying his own bias. Such is the success of Sacco's new journalistic graphic storytelling. By the time the author is chastised for taking interest in Bosnia by a local who asks, "Why you come, money?" (192) the reader knows that Sacco is instead embedded in the war-ravaged country to bear witness; indeed the people he has seen speak very much for themselves.

Joe Sacco is a creative force in the world, putting himself deep into conflict situations (Bosnia, Palestine), doing extensive research, and then documenting his investigations in the form of graphic novels. Sacco is an artist of the first rank. And brutally honest about situations for which the MSM has neither time nor the guts to honestly report. Thank you, Joe, for your work, which is both informative and entertaining on several levels. Each work stands up to multiple readings, and each reading reveals new glimpses into other worlds than our own safe and comfy one. Highly recommended. Anything by Joe is worth adding to your collection.

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