



Safe Area Goražde: The War in Eastern Bosnia, 1992-1995

Joe Sacco , Christopher Hitchens (Introduction)

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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 too become one of America's most noted journalists. The book features an introduction by Christopher Hitchens, political columnist for *The Nation* and *Vanity Fair*.

Safe Area Goražde: The War in Eastern Bosnia, 1992-1995 Details

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Melki says

Ethnic cleansing, torture, and rape seem like strange subjects for a graphic novel, yet somehow...this book works. Seeing the faces of the victims, not just reading about them, only serves to make the story all the more horrifying.

Sacco uses his black and white drawings as photo journalism, telling the tale of a safe zone that proved to be anything but safe for its residents. He offers up a history of the war through interviews with survivors, many living in bombed out shells that used to be homes and office buildings. Most of their tales are quite upsetting. They have witnessed scenes a human being should never have to see.

There are some moments of levity woven into the many pages of terror. The younger people meet to smoke and drink. They love American movies and music, and are tired of being cut off from the rest of the world. The girls long for makeup and Levis. One man has completely memorized a years-old Newsweek magazine. Many have not seen their loved ones in Sarajevo for years. They complain, and talk about their hopes and dreams.

This book was a good overview of a war I knew little about, and still can't claim to understand.

Ronja says

What are some people capable of doing...it's just unbelievable. War in Bosnia was literally like your friends stabbing you in the back only because of some nationalistic shit.

Anyway, I really did like Sacco's style. His drawings are pretty realistic, reading this comics took me way too longer than some other pieces of sequential art. It just demanded more of my attention to absorb its whole message. Only thing I missed there was view from the other side, what have Serbs to say about all they have done to people of Gorazde (and other parts of Bosnia). But still, really incisive account of some quite recent history.

Shannon (Giraffe Days) says

This is a book I would probably have never known about if it hadn't been for a little workshop I attended during my teaching degree. Which would have been a sad loss for me, because this is an excellent book, vivid and educational, emotional and honest, a book that brings a complex and confusing war into your lap, at the same time beautiful in its artistic skill, and heart-wrenching in the agony of its story.

Goražde (pronounced "go-RAJH-duh") is a town in Bosnia, which used to be part of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia has a confusing history, but it essentially came into being after the Second World War. It was made up of Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia and Montenegro. Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia achieved

independence in 1991 after their own battles, leaving Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro as a "rump" Yugoslavia. The population was made up of three distinct ethnic and religious groups: Serbs, Croats, and Muslims, all living together harmoniously until political leaders began stirring up discontent:

Little more than a decade after Tito's death in 1980, Yugoslavia began to come apart, and the driving figure in the break-up and the tragedies that followed was the man who would become Serbia's president, Slobodan Milosevic. He had exploited and encouraged Serb nationalism and sense of victimhood to consolidate his power in Serbia and extend his influence over Serbs living in the other republics. (p. 36)

A brutal era of ethnic cleansing ensued, and several different and equally vicious armies formed. The scary thing about this war is that there was no clear "good guy, bad guy" dichotomy. The Allies won WWII, and so Hitler is the "bad guy". Serbia comes across as the clear "bad guy" in this war, and yet all sides of the conflict were committing atrocities. This is the story of the town of Goražde, though, and it seems clear the people and refugees living there were victims. The Serbs and Muslims had lived together peacefully for a long time, until, with war brewing, it became dangerous to do so. The Serb population left as the Serbian army began annexing great chunks of Bosnia, and the Muslims who remained in this and other small towns in the area barely survived three years of bloody war.

The UN declared a few places "safe areas", but this story is also the story of UN failure to enforce peace and protect people - just as they failed in Rwanda. Every time genocide occurs, we say "never again". And then it happens again, and we shake our heads and Tsk while people in important positions make bad decisions or no decisions. And people begin to die, horrifically and needlessly.

This book is also Joe Sacco's personal account, as a journalist, of his trips to Goražde, the friends he made there, and the stories he recorded which make up the bulk of this book. He's a character in his own novel, so we get the contrasting Western perspective, but having the visuals brings home to the reader (so much more so than words ever could) not just what it was like, but how non-alien the Bosnian people are - these aren't people we can look at and not find familiar, like the Afghans (you know we do this, even if not consciously). They live like "we" do, they wear the same clothes, go to university, all that is familiar to us. If anything, it becomes all the more tragic for it. We can so easily distance ourselves from images of war in the Middle East or Africa, but seeing images of war in a place like Bosnia is like seeing war in Canada, or England, or France or America or Australia. These might not be rich countries, but it gives you a healthy jolt and reminder of what racial discrimination - and religious discrimination - can lead to if you let a few prominent people loudly draw lines between groups, separating people based on religious and racial lines, creating an "us vs. them" dichotomy.

Goražde was a town cut off and isolated from the rest of Bosnia, often attacked by Serb nationalists, but it survived. Many others did not, and the entire Muslim populations of towns were massacred. In Goražde, Sacco made friends with a university student, Edin, who had been very close to finishing his PhD before the war started and now taught maths, intermittently, to the students in Goražde. His proficiency in English made him an excellent guide and translator, but Sacco made friends with other men and women in the town, as

well as with some of the refugees. The story has an unusual structure, one that seems chaotic and jumbled, moving back and forth in time, from place to place, with no apparent sense of order. It does make it hard to grasp the time frame or remember whereabouts you are, but it also helps break up the stories of atrocities with seeing how people are surviving in the "present".

The complexity of the book itself is further compounded by how terribly complex the situation of the Bosnian War itself was. It's hard to keep all the different groups straight in my head, though I think re-reading it would help.

One of the things that really impressed me were the drawings themselves, the graphics. It must have taken Sacco *years*: the level of detail in them is extraordinary. So, even though I found the structure of the book sometimes hard to follow, and the political situation can get confusing, Sacco still did a really good job at explaining things, giving stories context and perspective as well as a personal human element through the voices of the survivors.

Safe Area Goražde took me a month to read mostly because it's so much to take in, so tragic, so horrible to think of us all going about our lives while this was going on. I vaguely remember it from when I was a teen, but - and this is a failing of the education system, in my opinion - we never looked into it in any class. No teacher tried to explain what was going on, or incorporated it into their curriculum as a kind of case study. Which is a shame. But I've found that teachers are much better at that these days, and have seen English teachers, for example, use story boards (graphic novel interpretations) as ways for students to interpret books they've read, like *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. You could use this book in many ways in the school system, either just a page or two or the entire thing. It's graphic format makes it a highly accessible historical text.

The war in Bosnia has become a kind of "forgotten war", a genocide that has slipped from the public consciousness. How can we even think that it will not happen again, if we pretend it didn't happen in Bosnia in the 1990s? Shame on us.

Schuyler says

Devastating is the first word that comes to mind. The story of the Bosnian War is a bit complicated (like most wars) but here is a radically condensed summary: Yugoslavia was made up of mostly Croats, Serbs, and Muslims. And after WWII, the then president Josip Broz, commonly known as Tito, looked to downplay ethnic nationalism and have each group live side by side peacefully. Then Tito died and Serbian nationalism took hold through the new Serbian president, Slobodan Milosevic, who became the president of the Yugoslavian Federation. Intimidated and scared by Slobodan's renewed Serbian nationalism (leftover from post WWII atrocities perpetrated on the Serbs), Croatia and Slovenia declared independence, leaving Bosnia to stand alone against the now hostile Serbia. So...war descends upon Bosnia, though "war" isn't really the right term because that implies two, more or less equal, sides fighting it out but really it was essentially ethnic cleansing of the heavily underarmed Muslims by the Serbs. Now, remember, Serbs and Muslims had lived peacefully side by side. They were each others friends, neighbors. But much of the Serb population had fled during this time, leaving mostly Bosniaks (Muslims) in Gorazde. So when the fighting began, it was the Bosniaks old friends and neighbors who came for them. Again, this information is skeletal. This is by no means a complete picture.

But that's where Sacco comes in. Through his reporting and interviews in Gorazde (one of the designated "safe areas" by the UN, whose power is largely portrayed as a joke throughout the book), all of the war's nuances begin to emerge. And all of the war's tragedies. Make no mistake, this is a bloody, gruesome, unflinching, compelling account of what was happening in Gorazade and Bosnia. The mass murders, mass graves. The snipers. The constant artillery fire. The understaffed, ill-equipped hospital, over run with grotesque injuries, with little more than brandy to dull the pain. Doctors amputating legs with kitchen knives. Dead children. Legless children. Rape. Houses looted and burned. Civilians drenched in gasoline, left to burn alive.

The vignette that haunted me the most was one from Visegrad, a small town just north of Gorazade. A man retells the horrors he witnessed from his window, as he watched Serbs load his neighbors in the back of a truck, take them to a near by bridge and proceeded to slit their throats, one by one, tossing their bodies into the waiting river below. All night, he could hear the continuous splash of bodies hitting water. Men, women, children. No one was spared. In the course of three days, he estimated he saw 200-300 people murdered on that bridge.

The art work is stark. Black and white. Shimmering, harsh, almost nightmaric. Sacco's style renders the Bosnian landscape and its people beautifully. I travelled down through parts of Eastern Europe in 2002. Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, and flew out of Sarajevo. Walked down "Sniper Alley". Stood on the bridge where Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated. Most buildings were in varying states of war-torn decay. The region was stupidly beautifully at times and ridiculously sad at others. Sacco does a great service to Gorazde and their surrounding neighbors, showing us through the eyes and stories of its citizens, that even under tragic circumstances, life can still be lived with joy, grace, and hope.

Rahmadiyah says

"Kupikir, kalau bisa, aku membunuh tiga saja dari mereka sebelum aku mati. Aku tidak rela ditangkap.... Harapan kami satu-satunya adalah bantuan dunia. Kami sudah menunggu berbulan-bulan dan bertahun-tahun. Kami berharap PBB bisa menghentikannya... Tetapi, mereka tidak berbuat apa-apa." (Edin, penduduk Gorazde ~ halaman 172)

Mengingat Bosnia selalu ada nyeri di hati. Ya, saya tahu peristiwa ini telah berlalu, 20 tahun lalu. Saya juga hanya seorang pelajar SMA jelang kuliah yang kala itu menyimak tentang Bosnia dari koran dan majalah juga dari kakak pengajar bimbel, ribuan kilometer jaraknya dari negeri Balkan ini. Tapi 20 tahun bukan waktu yang lama. Kekejaman di luar batas kemanusiaan ini terjadi di masa modern. Di benua biru yang maju. Di sebuah negeri yang jaraknya hanya belasan jam dengan bus dari Muenchen, dari Wina, dari Milan, dari Zurich.... Kekejian itu terjadi karena obsesi manusia durjana, yang ingin sebuah negara hanya berisi ras-nya saja. Salah satu daerah yang menjadi ladang pembersihan adalah Gorazde.

Gorazde terletak sekitar 100 km dari Sarajevo, ibukota Bosnia Herzegovina. Kota kecil ini pada masa perang adalah safe area atau zona aman yang ditetapkan oleh PBB pada April 1993 selain Sarajevo, Zepa, Bihac, dan Tuzla. Kota-kota tersebut berada di bawah perlindungan unit pasukan perdamaian PBB, Unprofor. Tentang kota inilah Joe Sacco, kartunis dan jurnalis, berkisah melalui gambar.

Selama tiga setengah tahun Gorazde dikepung dan diserang Serbia. Warga Gorazde mengalami kengerian

yang mungkin tak pernah mereka bayangkan. Tetangga sebelah rumah membunuh anggota keluarga mereka. Teman bermain bola membakar rumah mereka. Penjual daging yang mereka kenal menggorok leher tetangga mereka. Sementara para wanita diperkosa dan dianiaya. Bahkan mereka dicokok di rumah sakit hanya berselang setelah mereka melahirkan. Bagaimana dengan anak-anak? Tak terkecuali. Banyak dari mereka dibunuh dan dibuang ke sungai. Gorazde hancur. Sementara PBB tak berbuat apa-apa. Bahkan Jenderal Rose, puncak pimpinan militer PBB di Bosnia beralih mereka harus netral dan berpendapat jumlah korban dan kondisi di Gorazde telah dilebih-lebihkan (!!!).

Penduduk Gorazde yang tersisa dengan keterbatasan yang ada berusaha mempertahankan kota mereka. Edin, Izet, Riki, Dr. Alija Begovic, adalah beberapa dari warga Gorazde di mana Sacco mendapat kisah. Kisah yang dituturkan Dr Alija misalnya, benar-benar bikin sesak. Ia dan petugas rumah sakit harus merawat dan melakukan operasi para korban dengan keterbatasan. Mengoperasi tanpa obat bius, mengamputasi dengan pisau dapur adalah sedikit dari kengerian yang terjadi di rumah sakit Gorazde. Dan kengerian-kengerian yang lain terus terjadi hingga para penduduk berpikir bahwa Gorazde akan musnah di hadapan dunia yang seakan berpangku tangan....

Membaca dan menyimak gambar demi gambar di buku ini benar-benar membuat dada saya sesak. Goresan Sacco yang detail dan kisah yang menyayat adalah perpaduan kesesakan itu. Saya seakan tak mau berpisah saat sampai pada lembar terakhir. Saya ingin tahu lebih dan lebih banyak lagi cerita mereka. Namun di satu sisi saya berharap jangan sampai kisah di Gorazde, kisah di Srebrenica, di Mostar, Sarajevo, terulang lagi.

Michael says

Really bad things happened in Bosnia and dumb asses like me read about it in a comic book. I shrink in shame.

-m

WEF GN

Christopher Roth says

Not just one of the best things I've ever seen about the Yugoslav Wars of Succession, but one of the best arguments for non-fiction comics. Very powerful book. It gets deep into the inexplicable phenomenon of how Serbs turned on their Muslim neighbors almost overnight when war erupted in Bosnia. Puts a human face on the Bosnian war more than anything I've read.

Ikra Amesta says

Kejayaan Nazi memang sudah lama berlalu, namun filosofi fasis-nya masih terus diusung pada setiap perang dimanapun setelahnya. Tengoklah prahara di Gorazde. Sebuah daerah kantong di Bosnia Timur yang dikepung oleh pasukan separatist Serbia (Chetnik) sejak awal perang Bosnia. Sebagian dari populasinya

adalah Muslim dan telah lama sebelumnya hidup berdampingan dengan orang-orang Serbia sampai akhirnya perang mengguratkan garis pemisah yang sangat jelas di antara keduanya.

Perang Bosnia adalah sebuah upaya genosida (pemusnahan suatu kaum atau etnis) yang disulut propaganda rasialis yang sempit. Di tahun 1992, Gorazde merekam kecanggungan sekaligus teror dalam perang saat sesama tetangga saling membunuh, menembaki, dan memburu. Di sini seorang bapak harus bersembunyi dari seorang tentara yang dulu sering mengerjakan PR bersama anak bungsunya. Sebuah rumah dibakar oleh teman sepermainan yang biasa bermain sepak bola bersama-sama. Orang-orang berlarian, menapaki genangan darah saudara sendiri, melihat mayat-mayat mereka mengambang di sungai di siang hari. Dari balik jendela di tengah malam, ada pemandangan ratusan orang yang dikumpulkan dan disembelih satu per satu lalu mayat mereka dilempar dari atas jembatan. Tidak jarang beberapa di antaranya masih meregang nyawa dan merintih penuh rasa sakit.

Bila baku-tembak sedang tidak terjadi, datanglah ke rumah sakit dan lihat bagaimana para dokter mengamputasi anggota badan seseorang tanpa obat bius. Di sana ada juga seorang anak kecil dengan lubang di perut menunggu giliran operasi. Tidak jarang mayat-mayat anak kecil dijejerkan dengan kondisi tubuh yang mengenaskan. Belum lagi para pasien wanita yang habis melahirkan ataupun yang keguguran, dengan kejinya diambil paksa lalu dilecehkan oleh tentara Chetnik. Dan yang paling heroik adalah perjalanan panjang warga menembus dinginnya malam yang sangat menusuk demi mendapatkan bahan-bahan makanan (selama perjalanan beberapa orang mati pelan-pelan dan bahkan sampai gila).

Mungkin dibutuhkan cita rasa seni yang baik, dan sedikit selera humor, untuk bisa menilai isi dari novel grafis ini secara obyektif. Isi ceritanya sendiri bukanlah suatu hal yang mengenakkan. Bahkan sepanjang saya membaca buku, setiap kali membuka halaman rasanya selalu diliputi teror akan apa saja yang bisa ditemui dalam kisah peperangan. Drama yang terkandung sarat dengan pesan kemanusiaan tentang makna dari luka dan kehilangan.

Namun untung saja perang itu telah selesai. Cerita hitam ini diakhiri dengan manis, lewat pengumuman damai di sela-sela video film "The Bodyguard" yang sedang ditonton. Saat-saat penting yang mengharukan: "Dalila dari Gorazde menari dengan Presiden Amerika Serikat di TV." Sebuah klimaks dari penebusan panjang yang madunya takkan terasa bila sebelumnya kepahitan itu tidak pernah ada.

Dan sampai kapanpun, perang tetaplah perang, selalu sama, apapun alasannya, dimanapun tempatnya, kapanpun terjadinya. Selalu perih dan menyakitkan.

Nuno Ribeiro says

When I was first reading this (and did not imagine that there was more graphic journalism of this kind - I only knew MAUS as graphic non fiction) it was so hard for me, at first, to think of Joe Sacco explaining what he was doing, in Gorazde. It all felt so groundbreaking, and fragile and absolutely brave. There was a journalist, in a very unstable area, doing a story about war. He goes there so he can listen and take notes, talk to people, hear their stories, so he can produce a comic book. In the midst of a terrible conflict, that once again brought destruction and genocide to Europe, there is a man interested in making a graphic work, so he can tell a story. And the story is also the story about how he seeks the story, how he faces his daily tasks, he is a character. We get to see the process of building the story. Journalism becomes something exciting, probably like it hasn't been since the golden days of Magnum. Not because war is exciting. Reading this

book is often difficult, terrible. War is ugly and its stories make us face what we wish wasn't real. But journalism is the mission of those who do not want peace to mean turning your face away from reality - even if reality is hard to grasp.

Ruth says

How do I put what I've just read into words? A picture is worth a thousand words and Sacco grabs ahold of this concept in this profound and enormously well-captured work on the Bosnian War. Serbians and Muslims, who were literally living next door as neighbors, somehow managed to hate and kill each other in a way that eerily parallels the horrors during WWII. Although strictly from the POV's of Bosnians and never from the side of the enemy, I still believe it's a great piece of journalistic work depicting very real conditions that people had to endure through this period in time.

I knew close to nothing about what was happening in this little piece of the world before reading SAG. Considering the Bosnian War and its conflicts happened only 20ish years ago... well holy crap. The conflict gets magnified in this book in a way I've never seen before by reading traditionally. Drawing himself as a caricature with big lips and glasses that completely hide his eyes, Joe Sacco has delved into the most uncomfortable and immediate effects of the war on the people living through such a horrible situation, and he is only the observer.

I think that's what makes this book so special and attention-getting. Sacco really focuses on what happened to the people living in this region of the world, skipping no details. Panels like the "Drina" cigarette and "Drina" river right next to each other serve to remind readers constantly throughout this book about how the life of a person can be reduced almost to worthlessness. The blunt and matter-of-fact descriptions of eyewitness accounts of the horrors at Srebrenica and other places are a contrast to what is happening on the page, because although the words are shocking themselves, with stories of children and entire families being murdered, the image that accompanies these words truly made me understand the impact of what was happening. It's not something a textbook, Wikipedia, or a typical, traditional, journalist article could have ever taught me.

Highly recommend reading this to everyone, especially if you know absolutely nothing about the Bosnian War. Sometimes, we tend to forget that there is a whole world out there in front of us, and I think that conflicts like these serve to show how much more we should become aware of places we don't usually think about when looking at a map.

David Schaafsma says

I recently read *Terrorist*, a comics history book about the assassination that triggered WWI, and was nudged to reread Sacco's wonderful text, set in the same region, speaking to some of the same ethnic politics/history, of course, and I discovered this special edition, issued in 2011. I think the original came out in 2001, and it was based, like his also classic *Palestine*, on Sacco's first person comics journalism in the region. He isn't ever trying to pretend he is just some fly on the wall. He's there, and is often self-deprecating, revealing his limitations as an observer; he isn't trying to give the impression that he has a panoramic scope. He hangs out with a teacher in Goradze over the space of a couple years, after much damage had already been done there,

and he shows us as a journalist he has special privileges as people he becomes close friends with suffer. At the same time, his emphasis is of course on that suffering.

The heart of Sacco's tale of this Bosnian genocide at the hands of Serbs is in the interviews of people he documents, people who reveal horrific stories of the catastrophe there. Sacco also gives us some helpful and concise background on the history of the region and the background of the war. While he does talk to Serbs to try and understand how it is the massacre happened, he is not trying to be objective. He was there in Gorazde and helps people there tell their stories of unthinkable horror, survivor tales.

This edition has a great short intro by Christopher Hitchens, an essay by Sacco looking back on his journalism, complete with many photographs he used to make sure he got the details right. He's just amazing artist. This wonderful edition concludes with a Where They Are Now section (bringing us up to date, ten years later, on the key people he interviewed) and an interview with Sacco by Fantagraphics's Gary Groth, which provides an amazingly detailed look at the craft. This is harrowing, devastating, admirable comics, by one of the greatest ever, doing great work, showing what comics are capable of doing for the world, through political journalism. Must read comics and invaluable in this edition.

Kirsten says

I think this may be one of the most moving and gut-wrenching books about war that I've ever read. I'm not sure why it made so much more of an impact on me than all of the other books of war journalism I've read over the years. There's something about it that just really gets under your skin. Maybe it's that Sacco can show us these people -- not just tell us what they looked like, but actually draw them as they look when they are most vulnerable or most ugly and violent. The plight of the denizens of Gorazde really got to me; I found myself walking home from work turning the story over in my mind. I think what hit me, which had never hit me before so much, was the realization that these were people who lived lives very much like mine: they went to school, they came home and watched TV and hung out with their neighbors and went to clubs. And then, in a matter of months, people from the city were freezing to death trying to walk to find food. The neighbors that they shared food with were killing each other. It really shook me up, the idea that life could go so quickly from peace and normality to something so horrific.

Murat G. says

1992-1995 aras? Do?u Bosna'daki (Birle?mi? Milletler'in seyirci kald???) katliamlar?n, tecavüzlerin, yoklu?un, sefaletin tan?klar?n gözünden aktar?ld??? bu "çizgibelgesel"i okuduktan sonra bir "Drina" daha yakmaktan ba?ka elden ne gelir? Belki de bunu dü?ünmek laz?m.

Nitekim çok de?il henüz 20-25 y?l önce ya?anan bu insanl?k suçlar?na uzak geçmi?te kalm?? ve bir daha ya?anmayacak korkunç olaylar dizisi gözüyle bakman?n hata olaca?? kanaatindeyim ve Brexit ile beraber sallant?da olan AB nin kaderiyle yak?ndan ili?kili olan Balkanlarda tarihin tekerrür edebilece?i endi?esini ta??yorum.

Bu noktada; Srebrenitsa'ya soyk?r?m yapmak üzere ad?m atan Bosna S?rp Ordusu Ba?komutan? Ratko Mladi?'in ilk sözlerini ve bunun bizim vicdanlar?m?za yükleyece?i sorumlulu?u hat?rlamakta fayda var; " Bu toprakta "Türkler"den intikam almam?z?n vakti geldi.."

Kitap, bu ac? ge?mi'i yaln?zca tarihe not d?mek i?in de?il; hat?rlamak ve tekrar tekrar hat?rlamak i?in ?ok ?nemli ve de?erli.

NOt: ?thaki berbat bir bas?m yapm??, kitab?n sayfalar?n?n 1, bilemediniz 2 okumada da??lmas? garanti.

Aamil Syed says

What a vivid portrayal of a shameful human tragedy! The Bosnian wars were an unpardonable failure of the UN and the international community but we don't read about it at all. Joe Sacco does brilliant work in bringing the war to us using amazing artwork and a compelling narrative style. This should be widely read.

Arvind says

3.5/5 First things first - Loved the neat, sharp drawings.

This was my first book on the Balkanisation of Yugoslavia and it focused on Gorazde - a part of Bosnia. The title is apt and ironical as Gorazde had been declared a "Safe Area" yet it was far from safe. The book explains the roots of the conflict and then details the events of the war and the mindset of the Bosnian Muslims and their experiences. It was moving it was a one-sided war and the author brought out the stories of the victims' suffering very well.

Wonder though if the story has another, Serbian side to it. Keen to read more.

Jeff says

Safe Area Gorazde is a stunning work, combining the best traits of journalism, comics, and historical non-fiction. What really makes this book exceptional is the fact that Joe Sacco has mastered all of the elements of his craft - the writing and the art hold up equally well despite the high standards that Sacco has evidently set for himself.[return][return]The tale told herein is alternately thrilling, horrifying, and redeeming, but manages to hit all of those high points without an excess of authorial intervention. Sacco lets the incredible story carry us along with little overt preaching or moralizing. This is not easy to do with material that relates such a powerful tale of the worst shortcomings of the human race.[return][return]I think that until I read *Safe Area Gorazde*, I didn't really grasp just what the hell had gone wrong in Bosnia in the early nineties. This book cleared a lot of things up for me, and did so with an incredibly compelling narrative and graphic style.

molly says

To me, Sacco came off as kinda creepy but I did like that the majority of the book wasn't about his experiences or opinions (I didn't care for those parts). I appreciated that he presented the stories of a few of those who lived it.

Ryan Mishap says

Like with Palestine, his previous graphic account of life in the occupied territories, I didn't like Sacco. Here, though, he's less evident while recounting his experiences in the title town during the Bosnian war. As the Serbs aggressively attacked their Bosnian neighbors, took territory and lives while the world community stood by, "safe areas" were supposed to be fire-free zones under UN protection. The reality on the ground is illustrated brilliantly as Sacco draws out people's stories while occasionally filling us in on the larger political maneuvers, history, and failures. Give yourself a day to read this, space to cry, and you'll gain some understanding of what went on in this nearly forgotten mid-nineties conflict.

Malbadeen says

Ee-gads!

If you asked me to summarize this book with one word I would say...

INTENSE!

If you gave me two worlds, I would say...

SUPER INTENSE!

If you gave me three, I would say...

TOTALLY SUPER INTENSE!

Occasionally I feel remiss when it comes to world history/politics/current events. Occasionally it occurs to my knowledge of wars goes something like this:

-people in North America didn't like taxes so they threw tea around and then there was a war and now we have 4th of July.

-People were mean and stupid and awful and had slaves, other people were intelligent and good and knew slavery was wrong, they fought and slavery became illegal

-In the 40's there were the unthinkable events that were the holocaust.

-In some countries there was/is genocide.

-In Cambodia there was killing (specifically in "fields").

-Christians and Jews keep fighting over some land - maybe Palestine?

etc.

Sooooooooooooo - from time to time I think I really should get up to speed on the worlds atrocities so I pick up some thing that I think will be a quick fix. In this case it was this book. "Perfect" I thought. A graphic novel - finally a medium I can get behind for history.

But here's the thing. I don't know how much more informed I am about the War in Easter Bosnia but I am

further informed about how unfathomably insanely cruel people can be.

While I didn't expect this to be light hearted or breezy, I certainly wasn't prepared for the depth of horror I felt. There were MANY, MANY panels I had to cover the illustration with my hands as I read the words. I just couldn't look anymore. There was more than one page that had me near tears and I looked forward to every break in chapter so I could close the book and re-group my wits again.

Like I said, IT WAS INTENSE!

He'll be at Powell's on Jan 12th at 7:30.

Noah says

Joe Sacco's mission in life is to give exposure to people who are normally overlooked and forgotten. In *Safe Area Gorazde*, he excels at doing so. It is part history, part travelogue, and part war journalism all wrapped up into a graphic novel. The art is gritty and violent, and does not shy away from showing all of the horrors of war and genocide. The illustrations are impressive, but they cannot be said to look pretty- although that is part of the point. The subject matter and the world are ugly. So it is reflected in the book. While reading books like *Maus* and *Persepolis*, they were very well balanced between art, dialog, and narration; this book, however, seems much more reliant on narration than the other nonfiction graphic novels I have read. It does not at all detract from the masterpiece that *Safe Area Gorazde* though- it just means that it is a lot more like reading an in-depth novel than other graphic novels.

The main thread in the novel is Joe Sacco's time living in Gorazde, an enclave for refugees often overlooked throughout the course of the Bosnian War. Besides spending his time hanging out with friends he made and enjoying his status as a foreigner, he also goes around interviewing those who survived for their stories- and disperses them throughout the novel. By doing this, he shows the true horrors of the Bosnian War and the genocide committed against the Muslims- and provides a pretty good case that the official numbers of dead are lower than they should be. It also serves as a pretty good overview of the entire conflict because of all the background information Sacco provides, dealing with everything from the start of the war to the airstrikes to the peace process.

I usually pride myself on my knowledge of historical events so uncommon among other people my age, but the Bosnian War was something that I knew almost nothing about except that the US performed airstrikes during it. This book has certainly helped to change that. It serves as a warning about the dangers of nationalism and intolerance- and that, even in our modern world, they are still alive and can lead to horrible consequences, much like what is currently happening in the Ukraine. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in genocides, the Balkans, or even the modern political situation in general. And, most importantly, I would also recommend it to people to get a glimpse into the effects that hate and war can have on people- how even people who were once neighbors and friends can turn on each other simply because of religious or political differences, and how cruel they can be as a result. I am really looking forward to reading *Palestine*.

