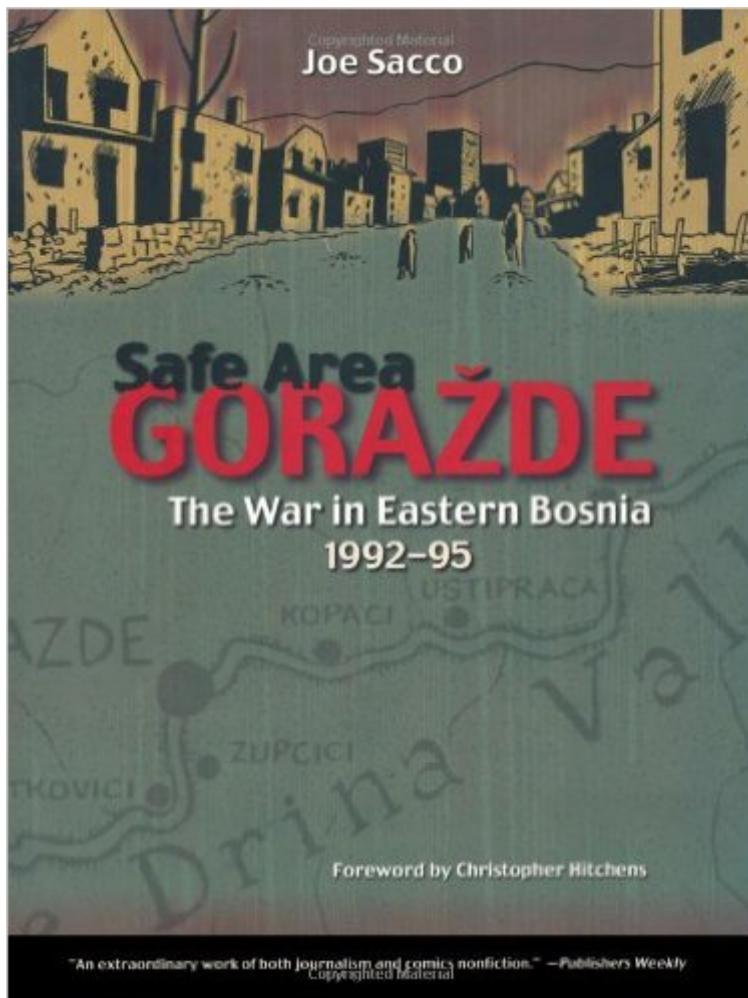


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# Safe Area Gorazde: The War In Eastern Bosnia 1992-1995



## 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

I bought this after reading a (very short) review in The Economist. I also ordered Palestine: A Nation Occupied at the same time. The progression in Sacco's work is incredible. The drawings in Palestine are a little TOO cartoonish but in this they are far more real. Both stories are in their own ways, equally horrific, from the everyday brutality of the occupied territories to the visceral horror of Bosnia and the struggles of its people to live some kind of life. His summary of the events in Bosnia

is one of the clearest accounts I have read - from the viciousness of certain Serb leaders to the culpability of the UN - he explains exactly how so many lives were destroyed in such horrific ways. He is a marvelous talent and his genre is a wonderful way to present news and inform people about current events. However, the really scary thing is the fact that I want him to produce something else. I want to read his words and examine his pictures, even though I know a world where Sacco is an unemployed bum would be a far better place. But as long as human beings act in disgusting ways towards each other he'll have plenty of material.

Someone once strongly recommended that I read this, although I have to admit I wasn't expecting much at first. I was really unsure how the Bosnian war could be rendered in comic strip fashion. However, "Safe Area Gorazde" is incredible: this is one of the best journalistic accounts to come out of the Bosnian war in any format. Sacco recounts the horrific war stories told to him by his friends and acquaintances in Bosnia with a great deal of honesty. He very effectively incorporates his own wit and the dry humor of the Bosnians into his narrative without turning it into a satire. I also like the fact that he was quite critical of the role of foreign reporters and correspondents (including himself) in Bosnia, i.e. their frequent insensitivity or their effective eavesdropping on the suffering of others. His illustrations also speak for themselves as he very accurately recreates the wartime destruction of property and the rag-tag appearance of the people; he has a unique talent for re-creating facial expressions that reflect a range of emotions. Hats off to Mr. Sacco, he deserves every praise for this informative and moving portrayal of wartime and immediate postwar Gorazde.

While graphic novels have been around for quite a while, graphic journalism or history has not. Sacco is a pioneer of this extremely humanistic new genre, and here he bears witness to the horrors of the war in Bosnia. Sacco visited the so-called "safe area" four times in late 1995 and early 1996, and his portrait of a devastated city and its survivors is more affecting than any newspaper account could hope to be. His black ink panels capture in vivid detail not only the scars left on the landscape, but on the people themselves. Sacco alternates between detailing his own visits to Gorazde, a straightforward history of the war, and letting his friends and interviewees recount their own terrible experiences. His own visits are fairly basic, everyone is frightened and devastated by the war and he experiences the guilt of one able to come and go as he pleases. The history of the war is very clearly told, with maps and pertinent statements from UN leaders, Clinton, Milosavich, et al. Sacco clearly highlights how ineffective and downright cowardly the UN approach was, singling out British Lt. General Rose and French Lt. General Janvier for lying and dissembling in order to avoid conflict,

and the Clinton administration for being inept and vacillating toward the Serbs. The history is a stark reminder that in the absence of a superpower with a vested interest, one cannot expect loose multinational efforts to deter genocide. Throughout the war, due to a total lack of leadership and moral will from above, UN forces were pushed around, held hostage, and at times fled into the night rather than protect the civilians they were supposed to. Which brings one to the most compelling and disturbing parts of the book. Sacco supplies images to the testimonials of survivors and witnesses to execution, rape, nonstop civilian shelling, snipers, and even poison gas. Most of the voices from Gorazde are those of Muslim inhabitants or refugees "cleansed" from other areas, and while the stories are chilling enough, what also disturbs is the confusion and pain these people feel because in many cases, it was their former Serb neighbors who participated in it. Sacco's artistic style may not be to everyone's taste, and certainly this is only a slice of the larger war, but he bears witness and hopefully makes the reader more conscious of the failings of leadership in preventing what was supposed to be "never again." American loves to pat itself on the back for kicking [...but] in the "good war" against the Nazis, but somehow we've managed to avoid any responsibility for allowing genocide to continue, even when it's been clearly within our ability to do so.

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