

persed them had to lie and shriek, as a thug or rapist will psych himself up to do something foul. If this is not the entire story, it is still the indispensable element without which no truthful story can be told. Sacco tells it through the microcosm of Gorazde, and we're in his debt.

A microcosm needs its context, and again I found myself impressed by his encapsulations. The historical and geographic inserts are objective, and do not omit the moments when Bosnians, and Bosnian Islam, were historically compromised (most notably in the Second World War). The Bosnians we meet in these pages are not heroic — though some of them are exemplary — and their greeds and needs are recognizable to any American or European; recognizable to the point of banality. Well then, Sacco seems to be saying, will you turn away from the extermination and dispossession of those who are so much like your own unlovely self? He at any rate could not do so; good for him.

Where there is bile in these pages — and I could quite frankly have done with several more pints and quarts of it — it is not directed at “the Serbs.” Even in their extremity, Bosnian victims referred to Serbo-fascists as “Chetniks” and thus honorably agreed to loathe them under a political and historical and not an ethnic rubric. No, the contempt is reserved for the temporizing, buck-passing, butt-covering “peacekeepers” who strove to find that swamp of low moral and “middle” ground into which the innocent end up being shoveled by the aggressive. Why was that road from Sarajevo to Gorazde so impassable? It had been wide open through several decades of inefficient state socialism, after all. Why did NATO armies, readied through the same decades to launch a thermonuclear war on a moment's notice, find it

inconvenient to face down a flimsy roadblock manned by a rabble of drunken racists? Nobody who witnessed this miserable spectacle will ever forget it; nor will he wonder how some of the worst deeds in human history came to be committed in plain sight, and without shame. It became essential for the post-Cold War gatekeepers to define Chetniks and Bosnian civilians as equivalent — echoing the propaganda of Milosevic, their “partner in peace” until 1999 — because otherwise the shame might become unsupportable.

I now, having disburdened myself, feel rather shy about saying that Mr. Sacco is also funny, and ironic, and self-mocking. We have been told that “it takes a village” and — never mind the implication for now — it probably does. A village or small town like Gorazde can mature for years in history's cask, ripening away for all its provincialism. The large majority of its citizens may be content or at any rate reconciled. But the awful and frightening fact about fascism is that it “takes” only a few gestures (a pig's head in a mosque; a rumor of the kidnap of a child; an armed provocation at a wedding) to unsettle or even undo the communal and human work of generations. Normally the fascists don't have the guts to try it; they need the reassurance of support from superiors or aid from an outside power and the need to know that “law,” defined nationally or internationally, will be a joke at the expense of their victims. In Bosnia they were granted all three indulgences. But even at the edge of those medieval paintings of breakdown and panic and mania, when people still thought the heavens might aid them, there was often the oblique figure at the edge of the scene, who might have hoped to record and outlive the carnage and perhaps to rebuild the community. Call him the moral draughtsman, at least for now, and be grateful for small mercies.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE ABOUT PRONUNCIATION

I have opted to leave out the Bosnian-language accents on the names of people and towns; however, my modest lay-person's pronunciation guide for the most prominent places follows:

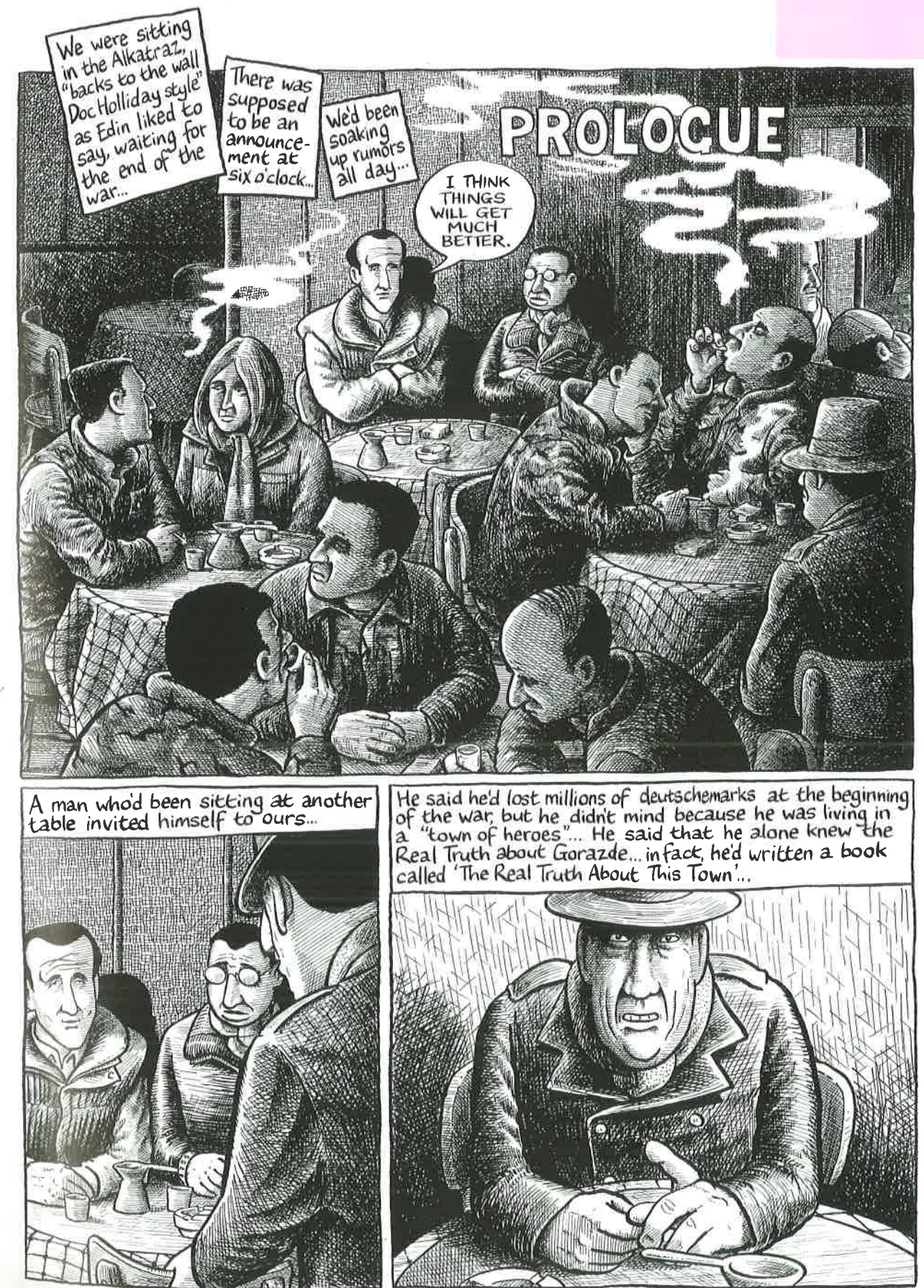
*Gorazde* sounds more or less like “go-RAJH-duh” (the “Z” is a soft “J” like the second “g” in “garage”)

*Visegrad* rhymes with “FISH-a-grad”

*Foca* rhymes with “GOTcha”

*Srebrenica* is pronounced “sre-bre-KNEE-(t)sa”

*Zepa* is pronounced “JHEPP-ah,” with a soft “J” sound (see above)





He was putting himself at my disposal, I could ask him anything I liked, go ahead, he said...



I asked him what made him think he knew the Real Truth...



He said he'd seen everything... During the worst of the shelling, he said, while everyone was in their cellars, he was out in the streets. He couldn't be touched. He couldn't. His dreams told him so...



He said he'd been believing in his dreams since 1957... For example, yesterday he had dreamed he'd receive a letter, and today he received the letter!



And if I were a real journalist, he said, who sought the Real Truth, I would visit him and look over his manuscript about Gorazde, and he would explain everything...

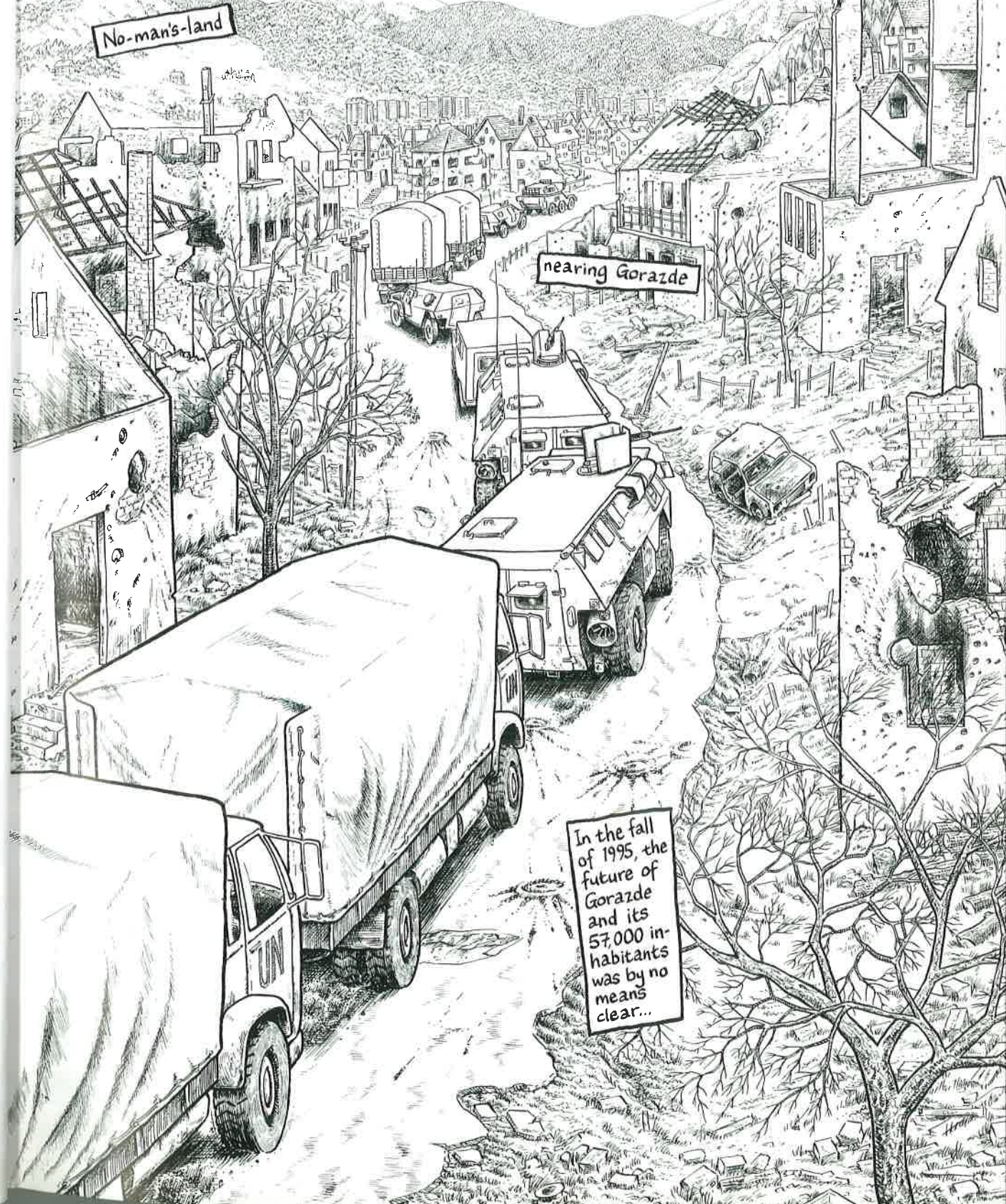


I never visited that man. In fact, after that evening I avoided him completely...



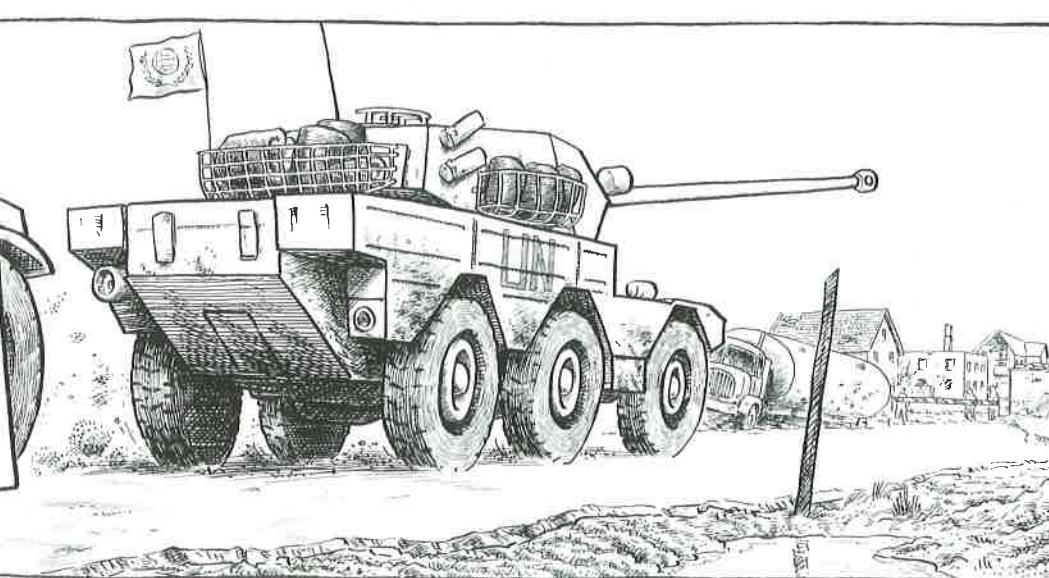
Meanwhile, six o'clock came and went and there was no announcement... None at midnight, nor in the morning, nor by early afternoon when an announcement had been rescheduled... Milosevic, Tudjman, and Izetbegovic were still behind closed doors in Dayton, Ohio, and maybe the war was going to go on forever...

# GO AWAY

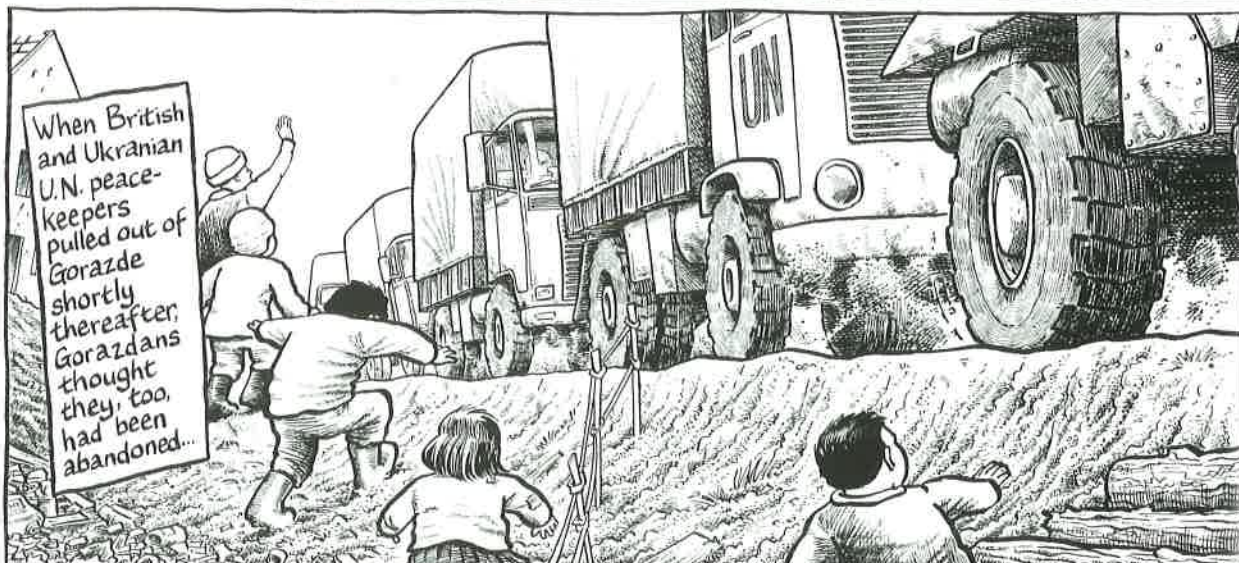




It was an enclave. It was surrounded by separatist Serb forces, it had been since the beginning of the Bosnian War more than three and a half years ago. And it was a U.N.-designated safe area...

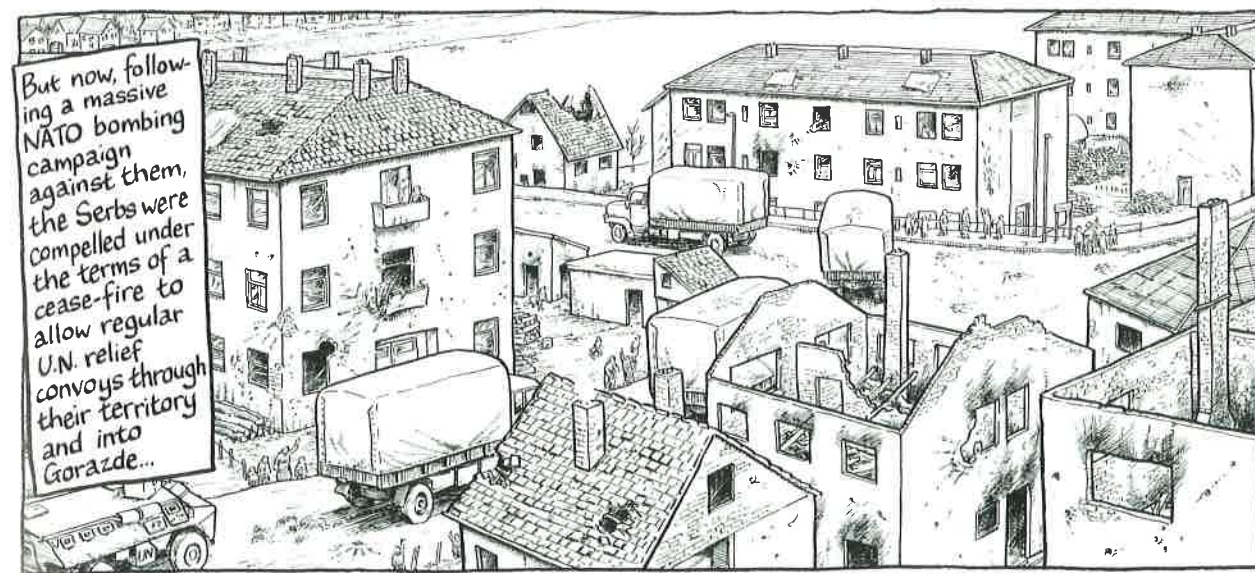


The two other eastern enclaves, Srebrenica and Zepa, also designated safe areas, had been abandoned by the U.N. in the summer. The victorious Serbs entered Srebrenica and Zepa, and, in the aftermath, horrible stories had emerged...

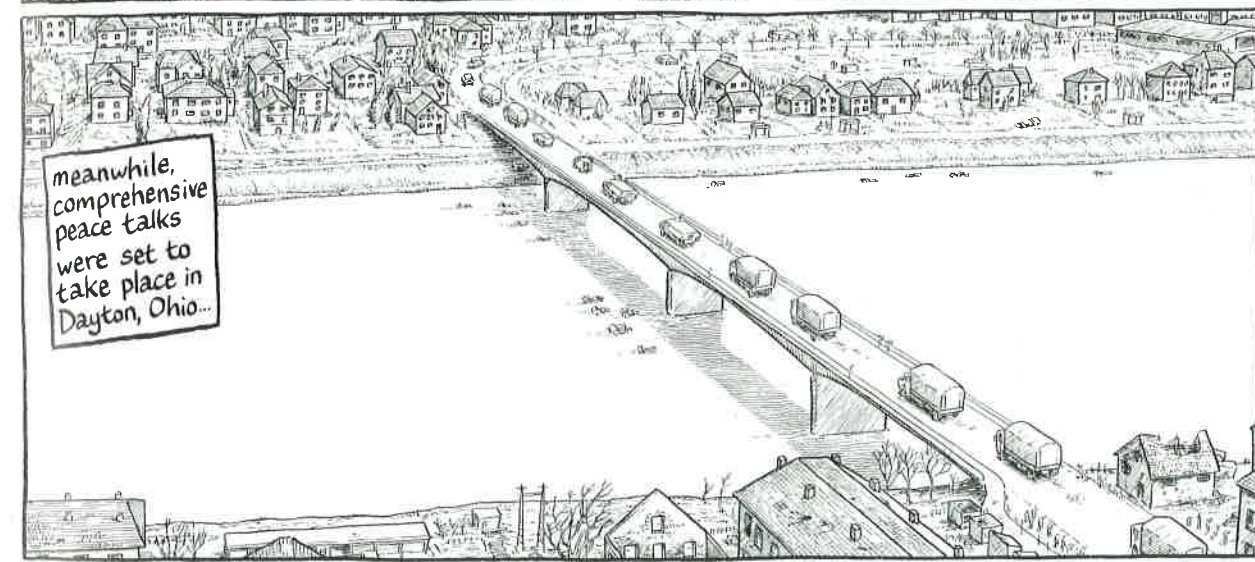


When British and Ukrainian U.N. peacekeepers pulled out of Gorazde shortly thereafter, Gorazdians thought they, too, had been abandoned...

But now, following a massive NATO bombing campaign against them, the Serbs were compelled under the terms of a cease-fire to allow regular U.N. relief convoys through their territory and into Gorazde...

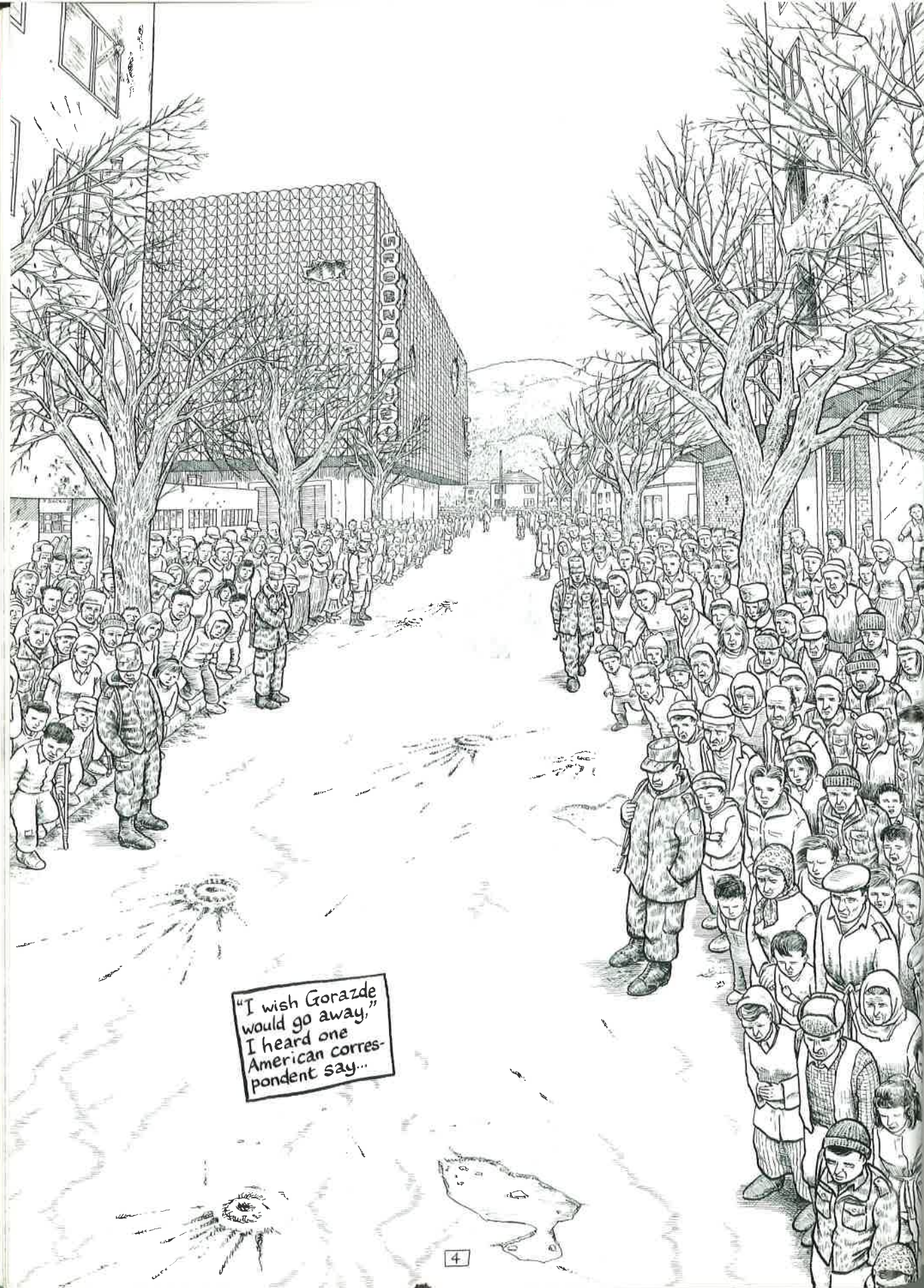


meanwhile, comprehensive peace talks were set to take place in Dayton, Ohio...

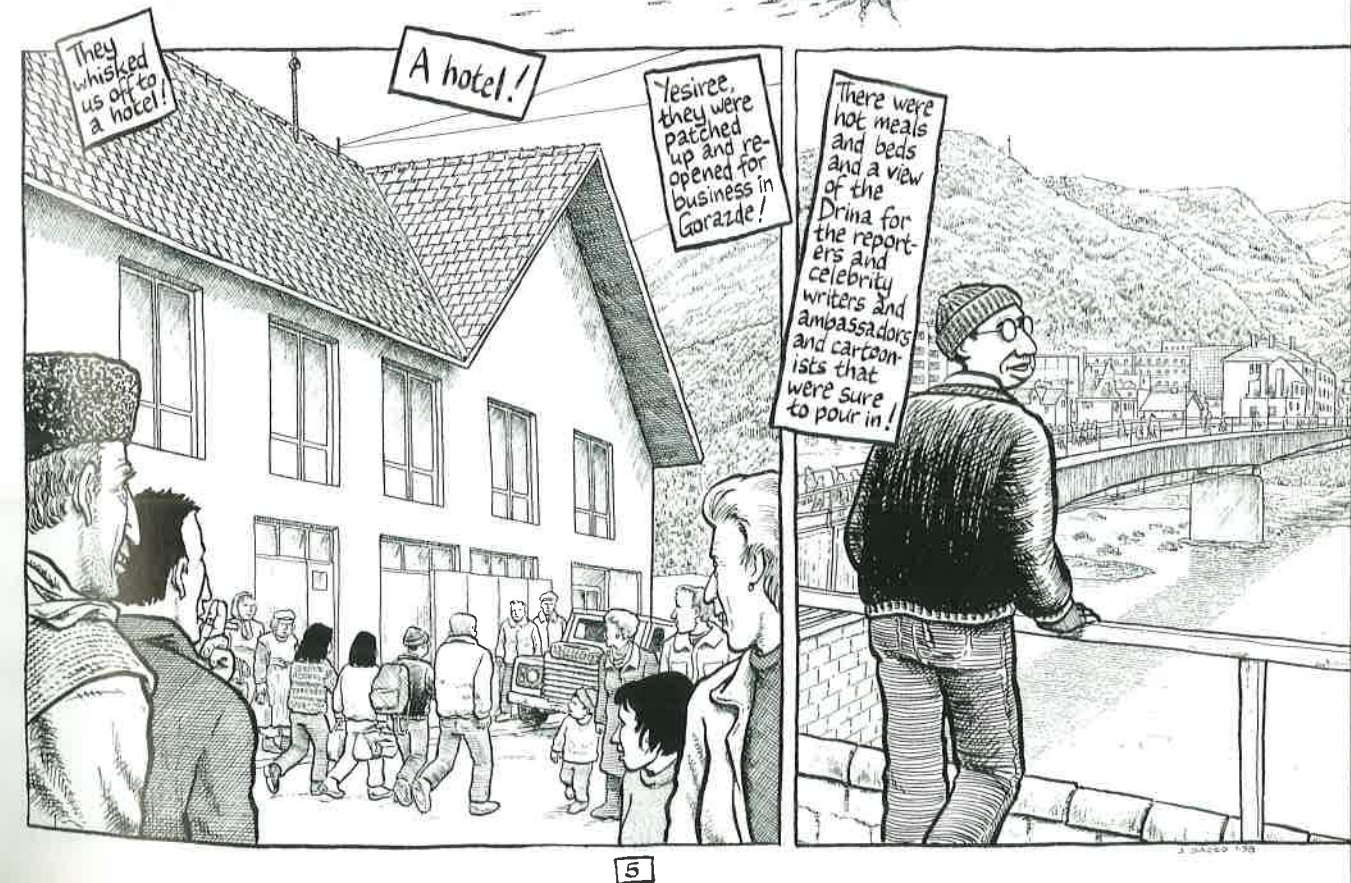


Foreign journalists, endlessly discussing possible Dayton scenarios, pondered the sticky problem of Gorazde's presence deep in Serb-held land. Some felt that a peace settlement would be facilitated if the Bosnian government traded the enclave to the Serbs for more territory around the capital, Sarajevo.





# RED CARPET PART I









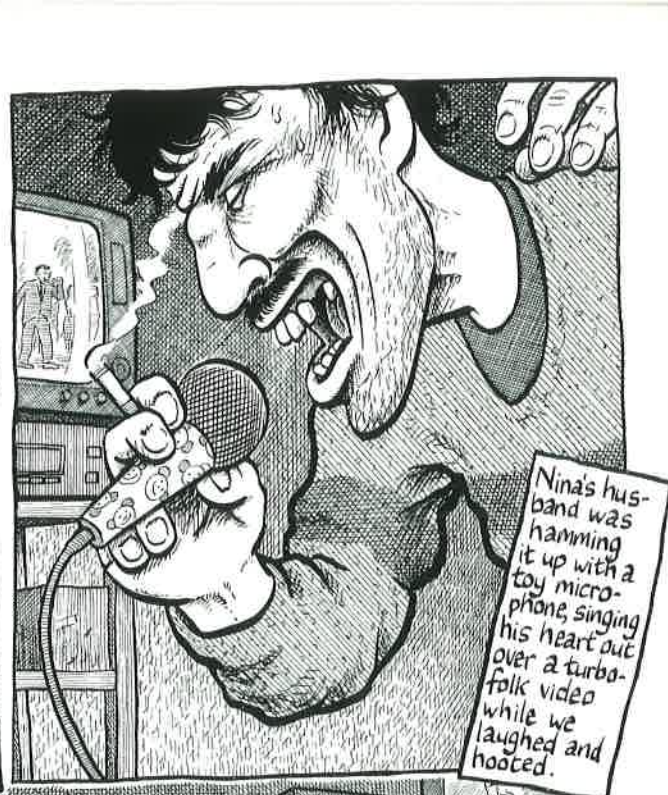
**PART III**



This fellow, Edin—he said he was a school teacher—he'd organized the party.



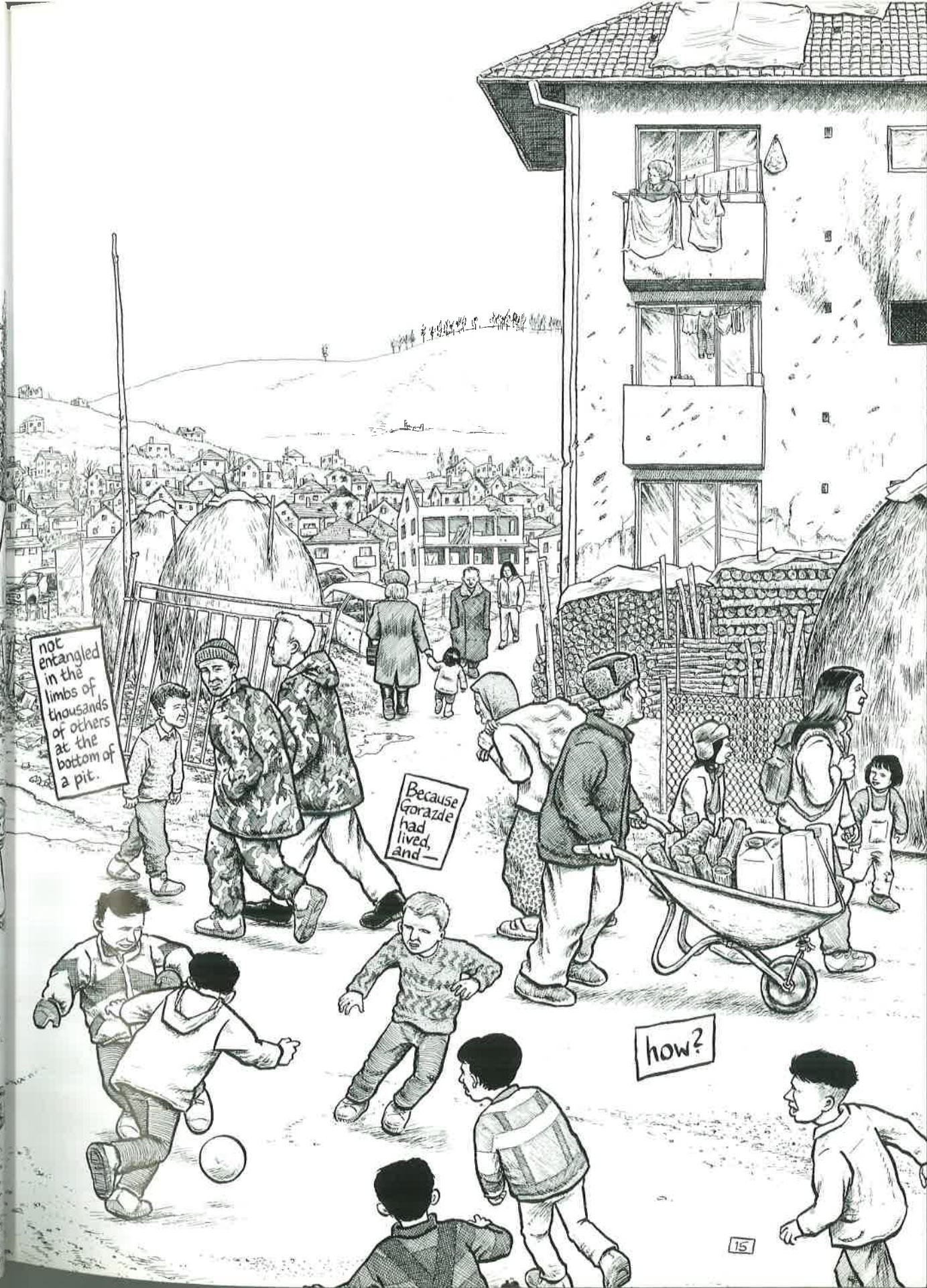
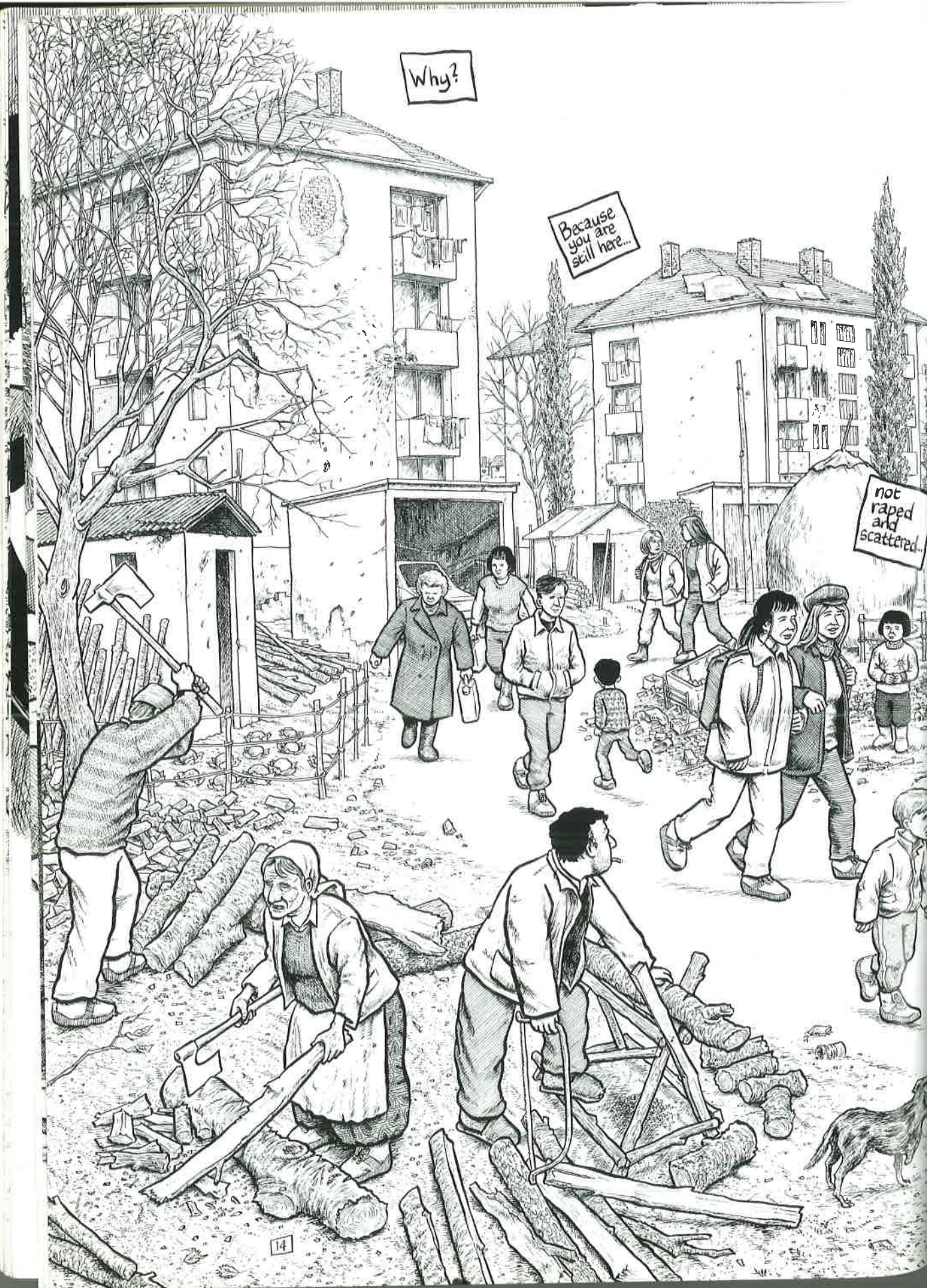
Later he turned out to be our main man, my main man, worth his weight in satellite phones to journalists who wanted the scoop on Gorazde, and not just the scoop. We wanted some laughs, too, a chandelier to swing from if available.



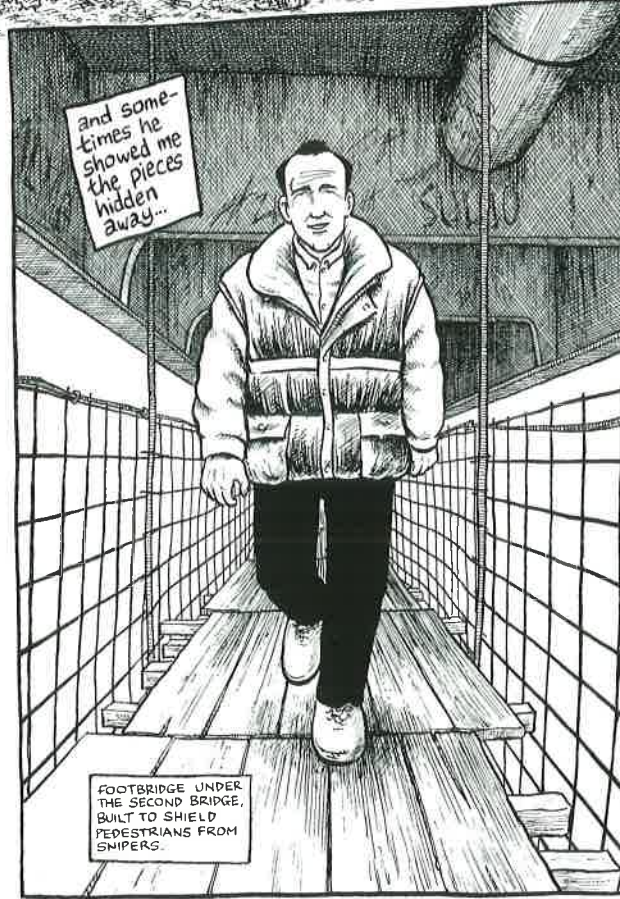
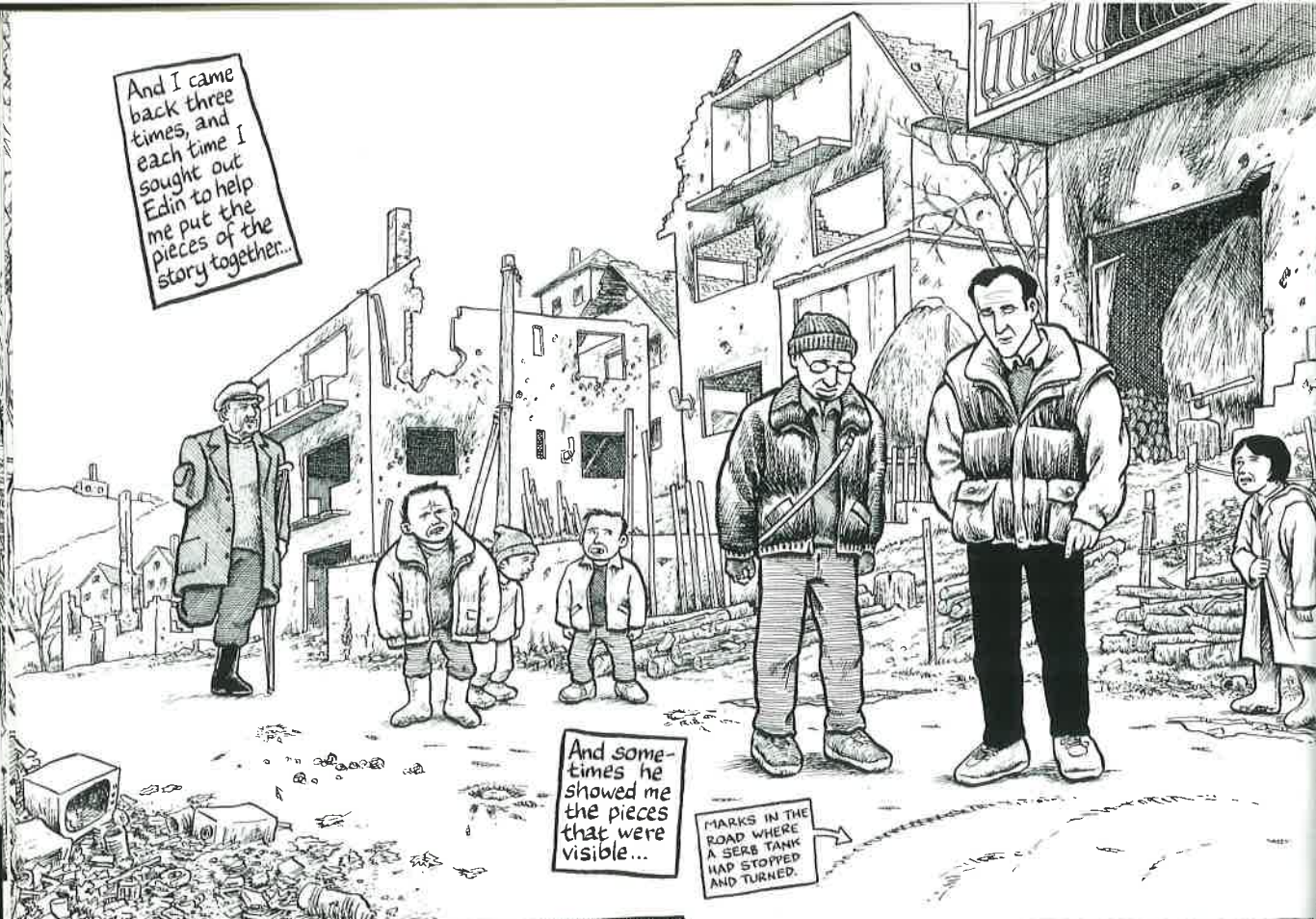








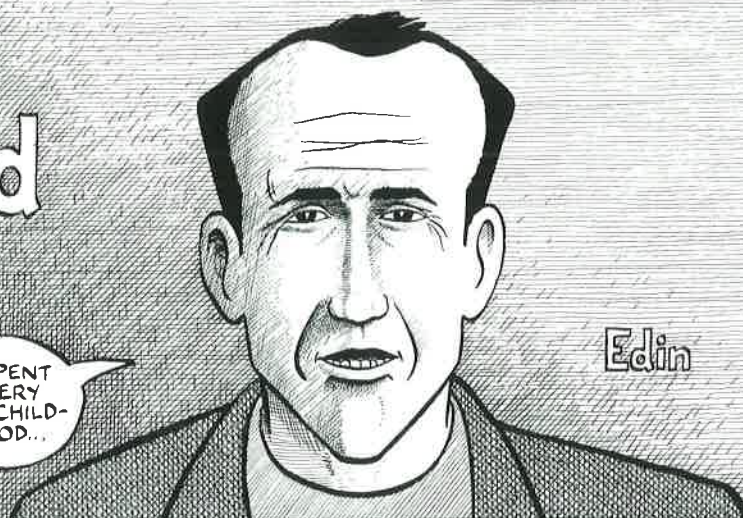






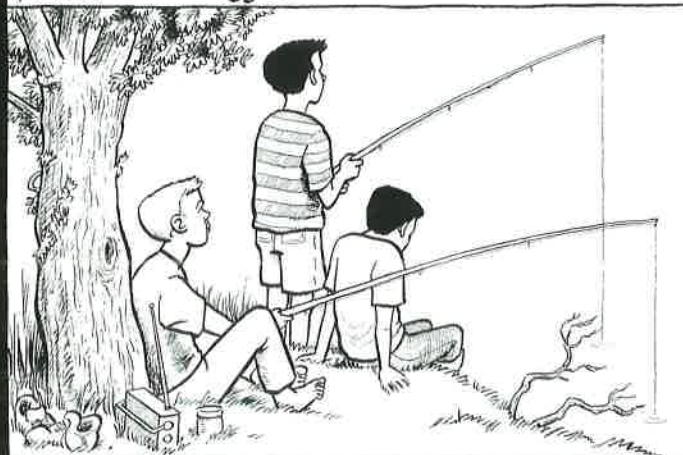
# Brotherhood and Unity

I SPENT A VERY NICE CHILDHOOD...

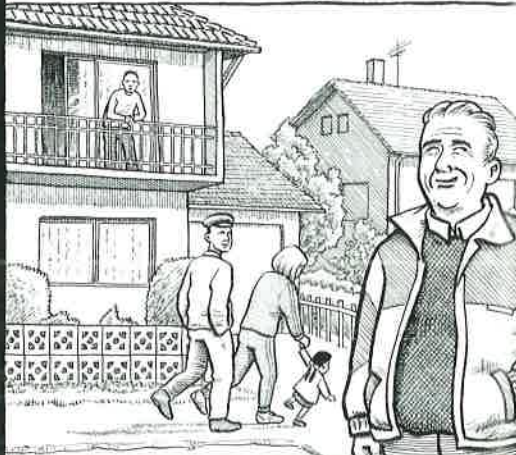


Edin

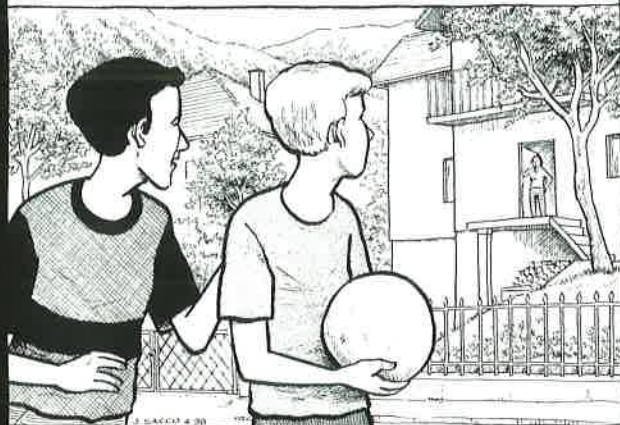
"I didn't make any distinction between Serb, Croat, and Muslim children. We were always together... fishing, in forests, on the playground, the stadium..."



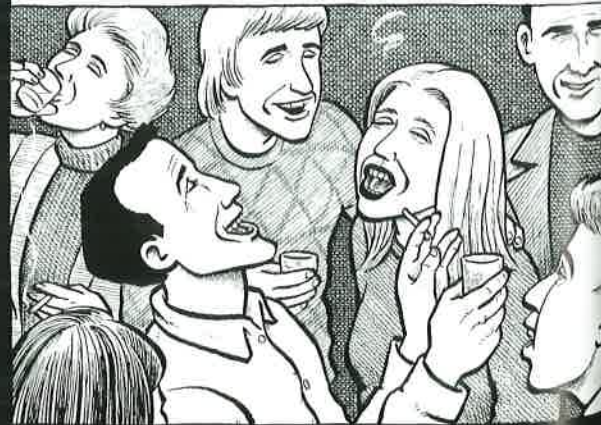
"It was a mixed population here. On the left of my house were Serbs, across the street Muslims, on the right Muslims..."



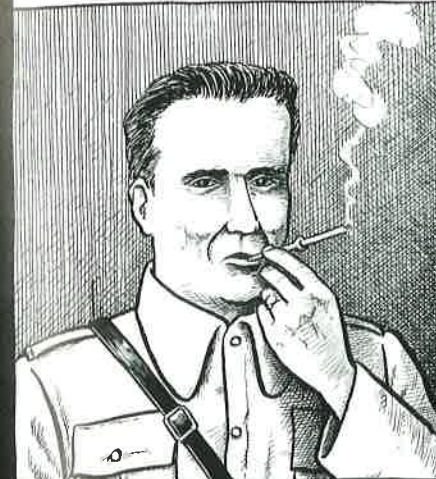
"At one point, I was mostly with a Serb friend. He was at my house during the day. During the evening hours... if my mother wanted me to eat, she'd call him over and he'd eat with me..."



"I spent all my life with [my Serb friends] Boban, Miro, Goran... I was drunk with them so many times... We were together at every party, at every place. We didn't make any distinction."



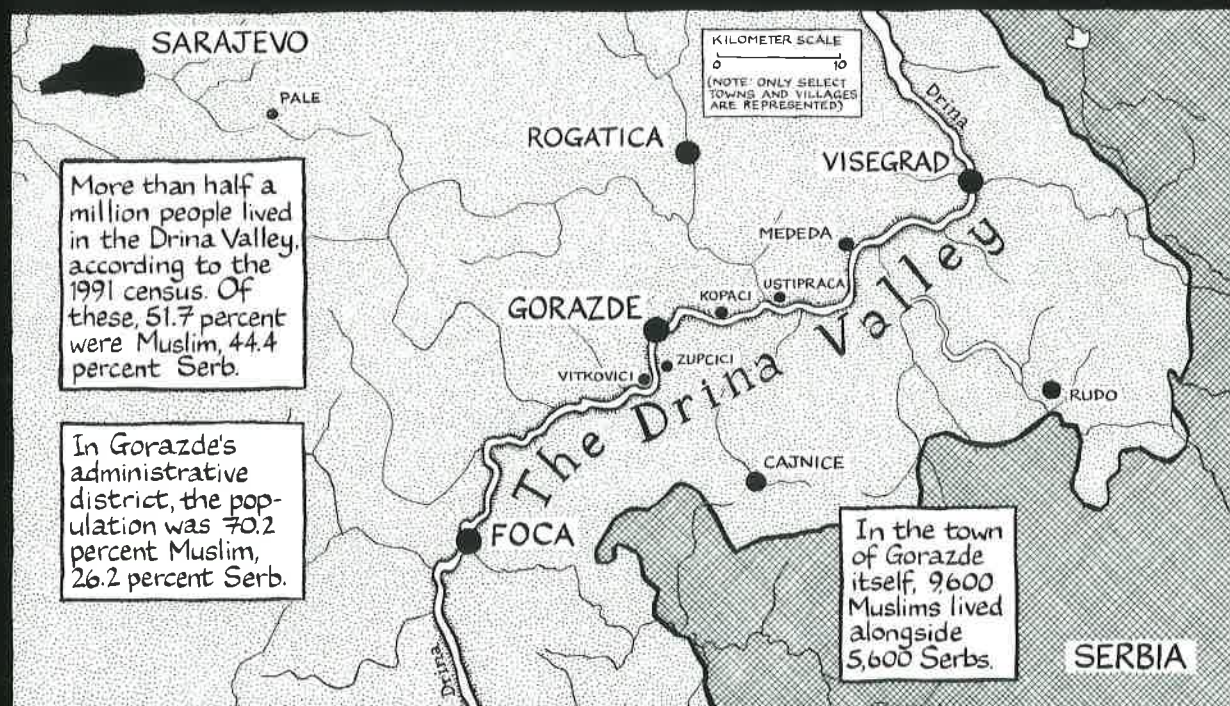
Modern Yugoslavia was fashioned out of the wreckage of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after World War II by the Communist resistance leader Josip Broz, better known as Tito.



Of the six Yugoslav republics constituted by Tito, Bosnia was the most ethnically diverse. It contained large populations of Croats, Serbs, and Muslims. Each of these ethnic groups has a particular history and cultural background, but they are all South Slavs and speak essentially the same language. Their chief distinguishing characteristic is religious. Croats are Roman Catholics; Serbs are Orthodox Christians; and Muslims are generally descended from those Slavs who converted to Islam during a 500-year Ottoman occupation.



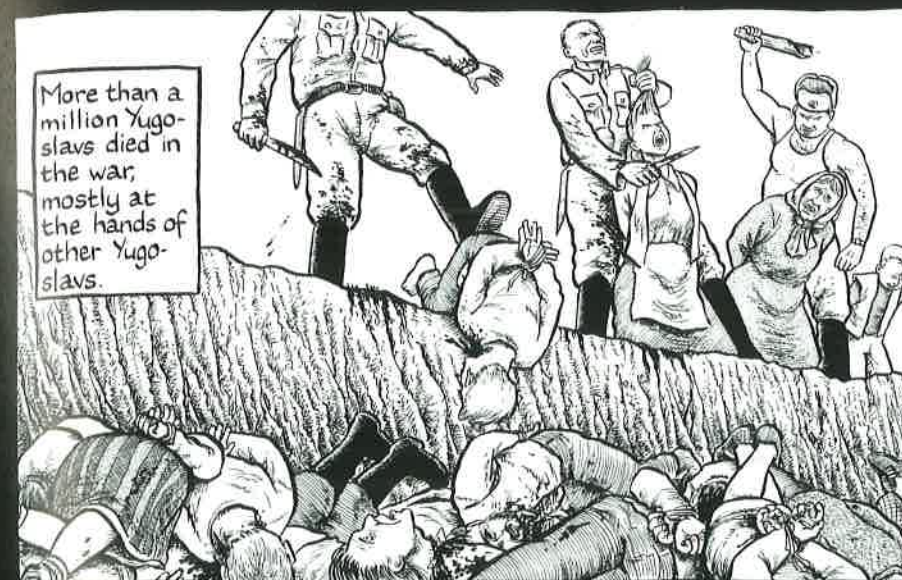
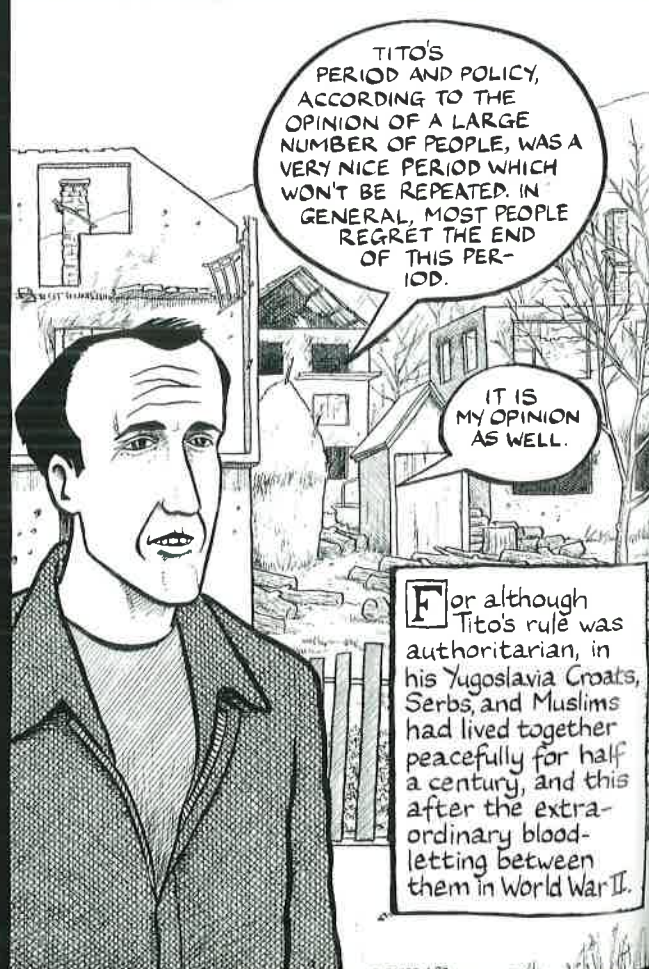




Tito maintained his policy of "brotherhood and unity" in Yugoslavia by suppressing overt signs of ethnic nationalism among the different Yugoslav peoples.

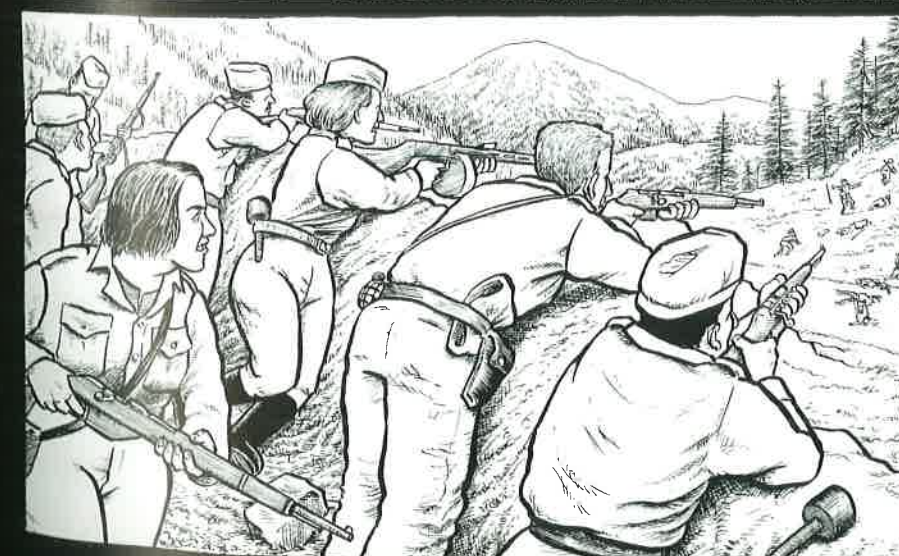


If Tito managed to create something of a Yugoslav identity, he did so without defusing or allowing for an airing of the nationalities' grievances. Those grievances would be exploited by politicians jockeying for power once President-for-life Tito was gone.



When the Axis powers occupied and dismembered the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1941, they installed Croatian fascists, the Ustasha, in their own state, which was expanded to include Bosnia. The fury with which the Ustasha carried out their genocidal program of wholesale slaughter, forced religious conversion, and expulsion of the Serb population left even the Nazis aghast. Ustasha victims fed the ranks of two competing resistance groups, the Chetniks and the Partisans.

The Chetniks were a somewhat loose alliance of groups of Serb nationalists and royalists who typically sought the establishment of a Greater Serbia cleansed of non-Serbs. The Chetniks waged a ruthless war against Bosnia's Croat and Muslim citizenry, whom they viewed as Ustasha collaborators, and against the Partisans, whom they saw as likely post-war rivals.



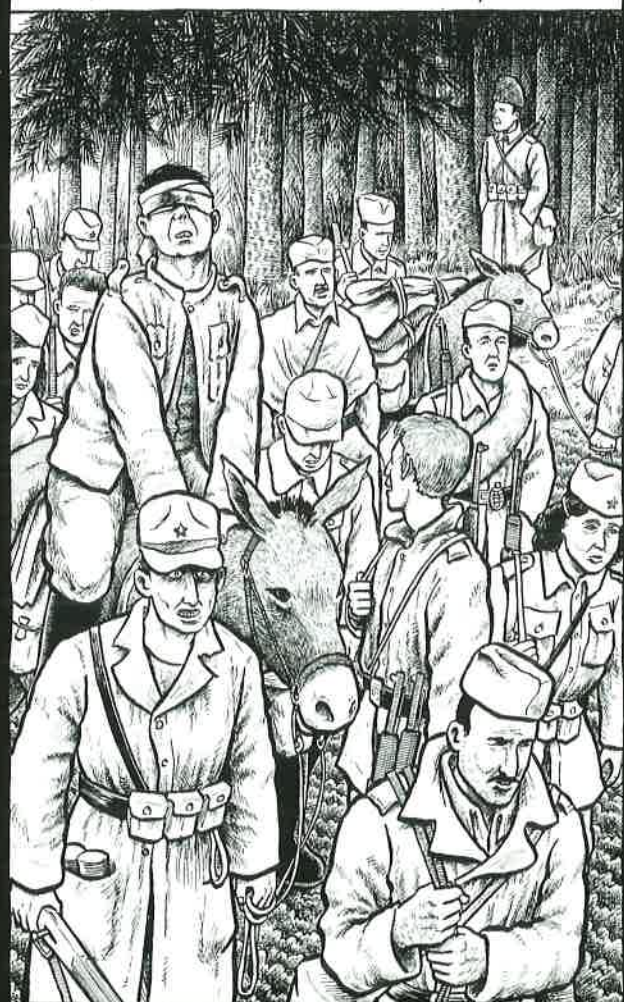
The Partisans, the Communist resistance force led by Tito, also were a predominantly Serb group (Tito himself was half-Croatian, half-Slovenian), but they welcomed a growing number of Muslim and Croatian recruits as disillusionment with the Ustasha regime increased and Chetnik outrages continued. The Partisans fought a generally defensive war against Axis forces and waged an aggressive campaign against the Chetniks, whom they eventually crushed.



Bosnia's Muslims could be found on all sides of the conflict. A few even allied themselves with the Chetniks. Others joined in the Ustasha persecution of the Serbs. Several thousand volunteered with the Germans for a Muslim S.S. division which carried out anti-Serb atrocities.



As chaos spread, some Muslims formed autonomous defense units for protection against any and all threats, and in greater and greater numbers Muslims joined the multi-ethnic Partisans, which led to more Chetnik reprisals.



Hundreds of thousands of Serbs were killed in the war, mostly by the Ustasha, but the Muslims lost a greater percentage of their population, mostly in Chetnik attacks and massacres, many of which took place in Eastern Bosnia.



"They were coming and going whenever they liked, in small groups, burning houses, killing people, raping women... Muslims in this area did not have anything to defend themselves with.



"The Chetniks raped and slaughtered... so many of my cousins and Muslims in this area. The worst things happened in Foca. The village of my family, Bucije... over the River Drina, the Chetniks completely blew up, and whenever they found they killed. We're talking about the men...



"When people heard that these groups were coming, as fast as possible they were hiding themselves or escaping somewhere. My grandfather hid himself with the help of his wife for nearly one year under the cows' shed in the ground...



"In that time, Muslims... escaped from Gorazde... They organized themselves in groups and ran from one place to the other because of the traitors, the Chetniks and the Ustasha. My grandparents were able to go to Brcko and Visoko.



"My grandfather and grandmother sometimes tried to explain to me what happened during World War II, but I did not listen, or listened with one ear."

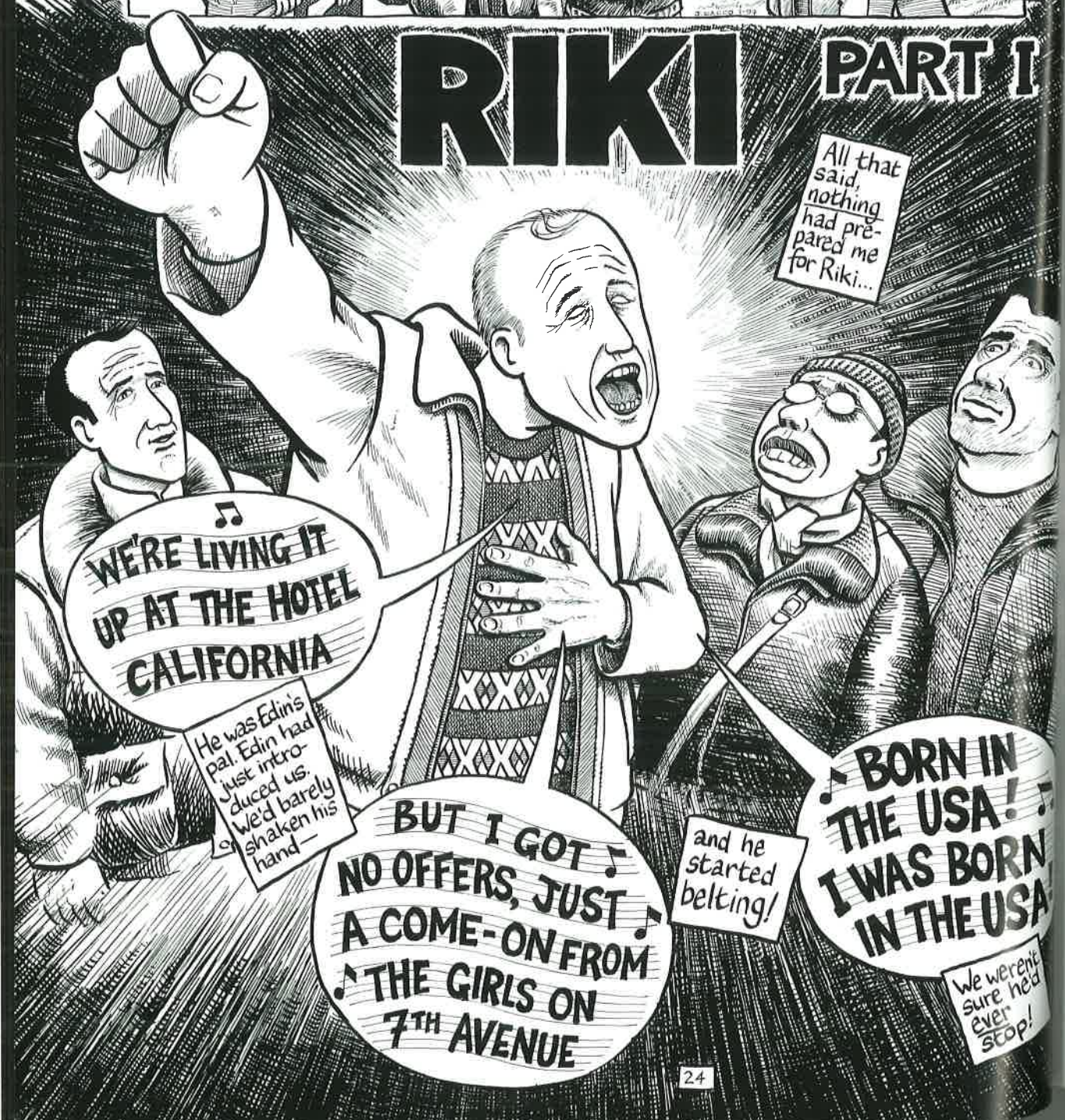




It was still early on in the enclave's coming out party and there was little of the indifference or even disdain correspondents encountered in Sarajevo a city gagging on tape recorders and cameras...

In Gorazde journalists were still exotics, guests from outside - from outside! They welcomed us and all the promise our outsidership implied...

# RIKI PART I



WE'RE LIVING IT UP AT THE HOTEL CALIFORNIA

He was Edin's pal. Edin had just introduced us. We'd barely shaken his hand—

BUT I GOT NO OFFERS, JUST A COME-ON FROM THE GIRLS ON 7TH AVENUE

All that said, nothing had prepared me for Riki...

and he started belting!

BORN IN THE USA! I WAS BORN IN THE USA

We weren't sure he'd stop!

He stopped. My colleague Whit and I applauded.

(He hadn't been bad, after all, even without a stadium.)

Then— I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO THANK THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA FOR WHAT IT HAS DONE FOR US.

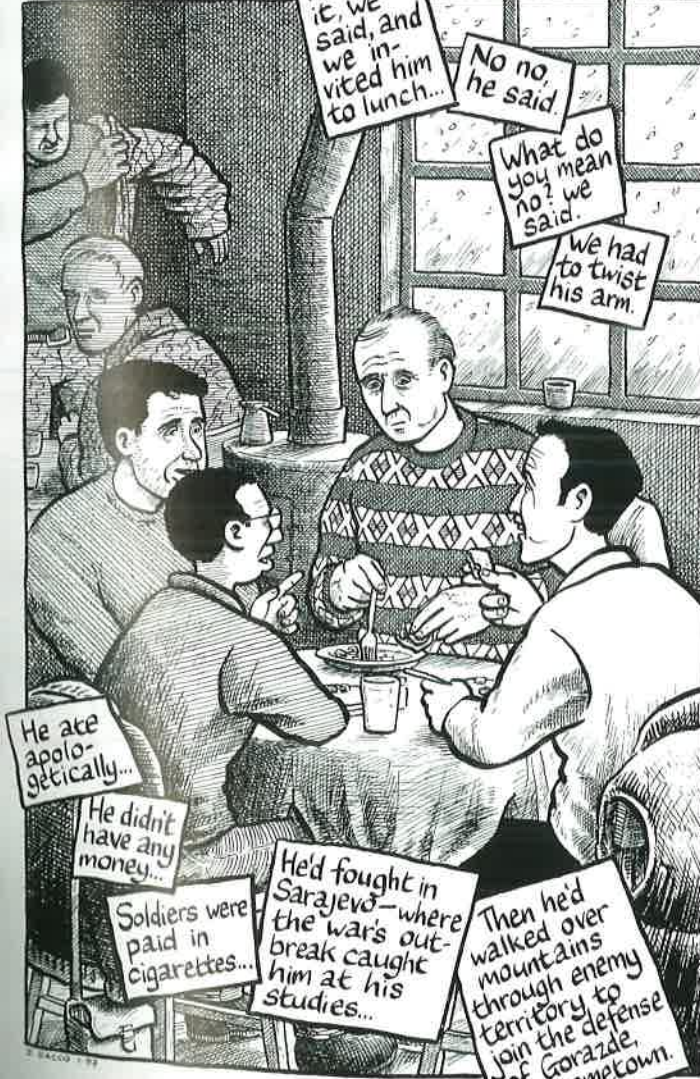
He meant bombing the Serbs.

Don't mention it, we said, and we invited him to lunch...

No no, he said.

What do you mean no? we said.

We had to twist his arm.



He ate apologetically...

He didn't have any money...

Soldiers were paid in cigarettes...

He'd fought in Sarajevo—where the war's outbreak caught him at his studies...

Then he'd walked over mountains through enemy territory to join the defense of Gorazde, his hometown.

Whit and I brought up the possibility that his government might swap Gorazde for a chunk of Serb territory around Sarajevo.

WE SHOULD NOT GIVE UP GORAZDE FOR ANY OTHER PART OF BOSNIA.

Too many sacrifices had been made here, he said, too many lives lost...

IT IS VERY HORRIBLE, WHAT HAS BEFALLEN US. THE MALEFACTORS MUST BE SENT TO THE HAGUE TO STAND TRIAL FOR WAR CRIMES.



"befallen!"

"malefactors"



As well as I got to know Riki, and as many times as I asked, he remained reticent about his experiences in combat. That day we first met, he told me as much as he ever would...



I HAVE SEEN MANY HORRIBLE THINGS.

THEY HAVE ARTILLERY, TANKS, A LOT OF WEAPONS.

WE HAVE NOTHING.

I SAW MANY PEOPLE KILLED, PARTS OF PEOPLE.

HORRIBLE THINGS.

MAKING LOVE IN THE AFTERNOON WITH CECILIA UP IN MY BEDROOM... MAKING LOOOOOVE

WOO

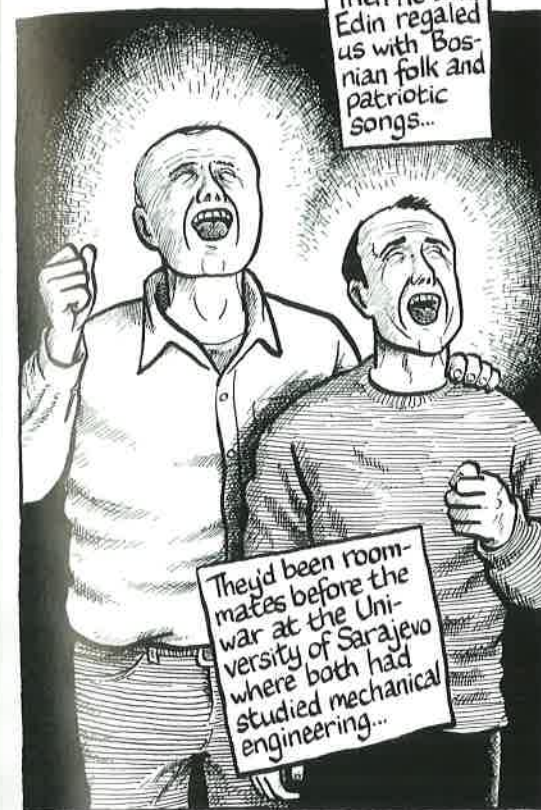
The next night, Riki invited Edin, Whit, a Turkish journalist named Serif, and me to his home for dinner. Riki's mother served pots of coffee and wave after wave of Bosnian specialties, indulging us in a way that was extravagant then and would have been impossible just two weeks before...



Afterwards, Riki ran through every Beatles, Doors and Stones song he knew, and some he didn't. He reprised 'Hotel California' two or three times...

THIS COULD BE HEAVEN OR THIS COULD BE HELL

Then he and Edin regaled us with Bosnian folk and patriotic songs...



They'd been roommates before the war at the University of Sarajevo where both had studied mechanical engineering...

It got late and we were quieting down...

the three of us who were outsiders began speculating about Gorazde's future...

their future...



land swap?

evacuation?

Like most foreigners in Bosnia, we enjoyed weaving our theories...

Then Serif, perhaps the most charming journalist in all of Bosnia, who, as a Turkish national, had passed through Serb territory to reach Gorazde at some peril, began a gentle, sleepy summation of how she'd come to cover the war for ten days and stayed two years...







Never fear!

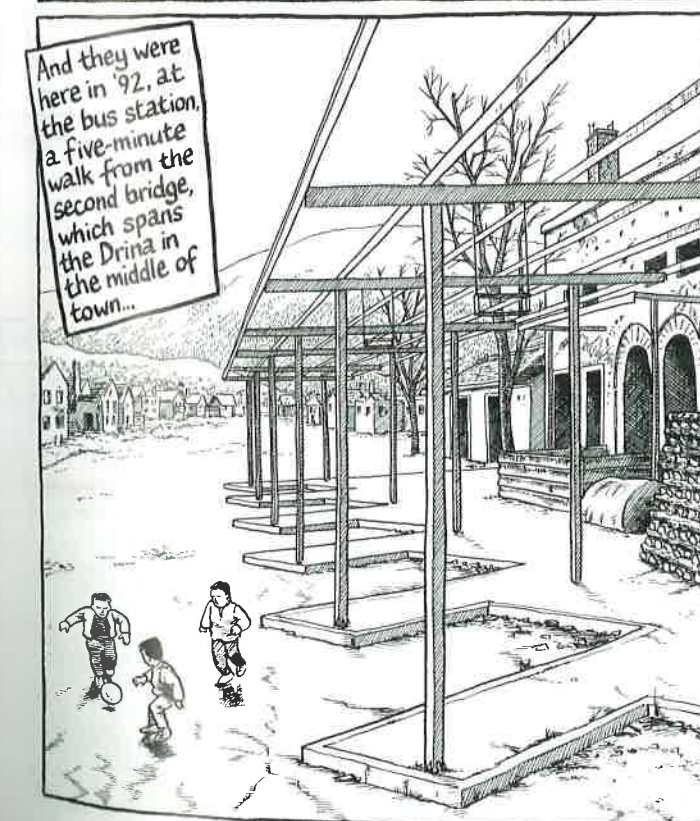
I WANT TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO THANK YOU FOR WHAT YOU HAVE DONE FOR THE BOSNIAN PEOPLE.

YOU ARE THE BRAVEST GIRL I HAVE EVER MET.

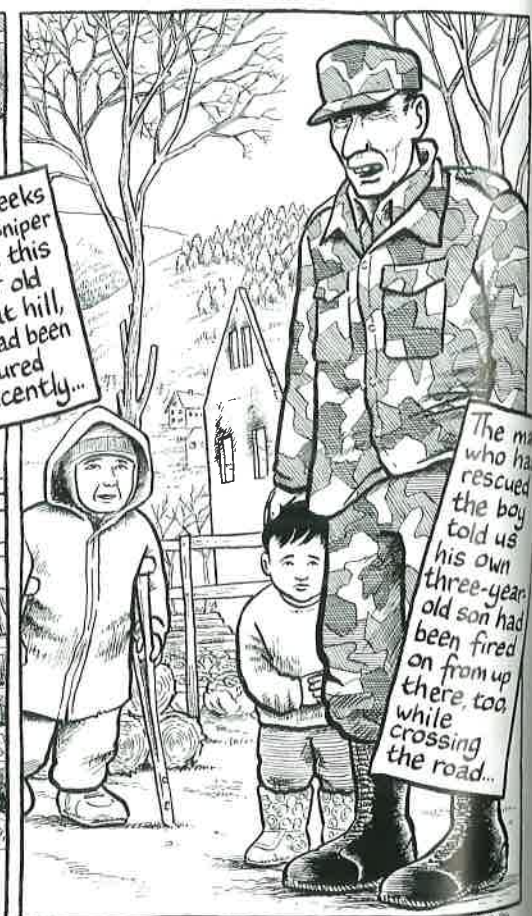
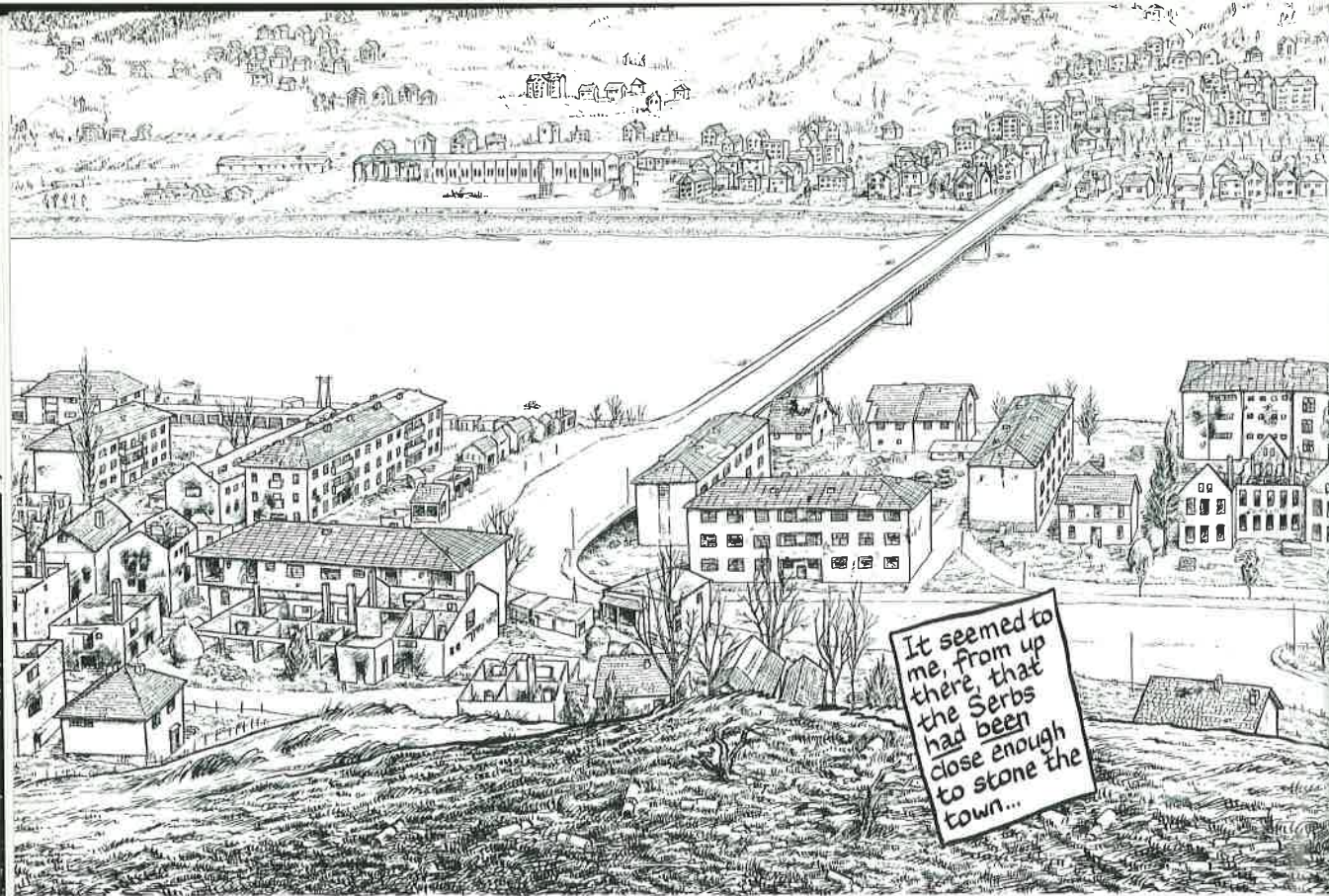
I HAVE A SONG FOR YOU—

WO WO YAY YAY  
I LOVE YOU MORE  
THAN I CAN SAY, I'LL  
LOVE YOU TWICE AS  
MUCH TOMORROW  
WO WO...

The next day Riki was back on the front-line... three days' duty in a trench on a mountain above Gorazde...











Their place, I'm telling you, it wasn't up to code. To get to it, you had to climb upstairs and cross a room whose floor seemed ready to give way.

After the Serbs had come through in '94, they set the place on fire.

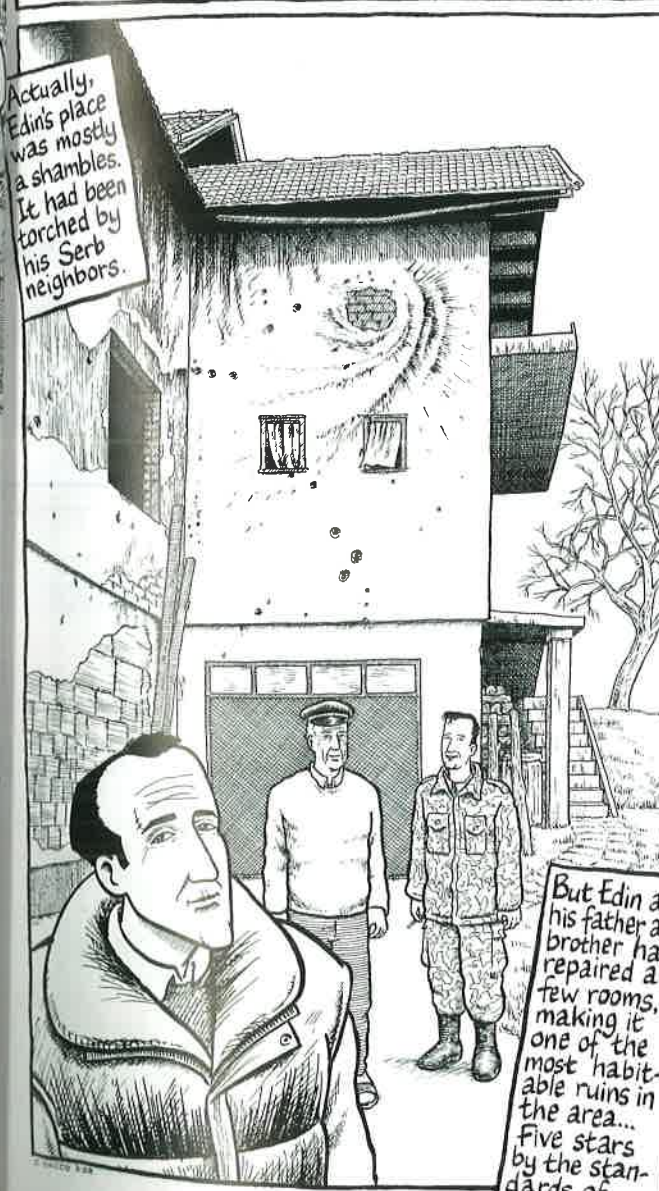
WE ESCAPED JUST AHEAD OF THEM. WE HAD TO STOP EVERY 15 MINUTES BECAUSE MY HUSBAND CAN HARDLY WALK.



By the way, I'd moved in with Edin and made his place home base on my visits. That hotel I told you about? A war-zone racket! Freezing in there to boot! Edin's house, at least, had one heated room and plenty of couch space.



Actually, Edin's place was mostly a shambles. It had been torched by his Serb neighbors.



But Edin and his father and brother had repaired a few rooms, making it one of the most habitable ruins in the area... Five stars by the standards of Kokino Selo!

I asked why she lived in such a vulnerable area which twice had been overrun by the Serbs...

There was the garden, she said.

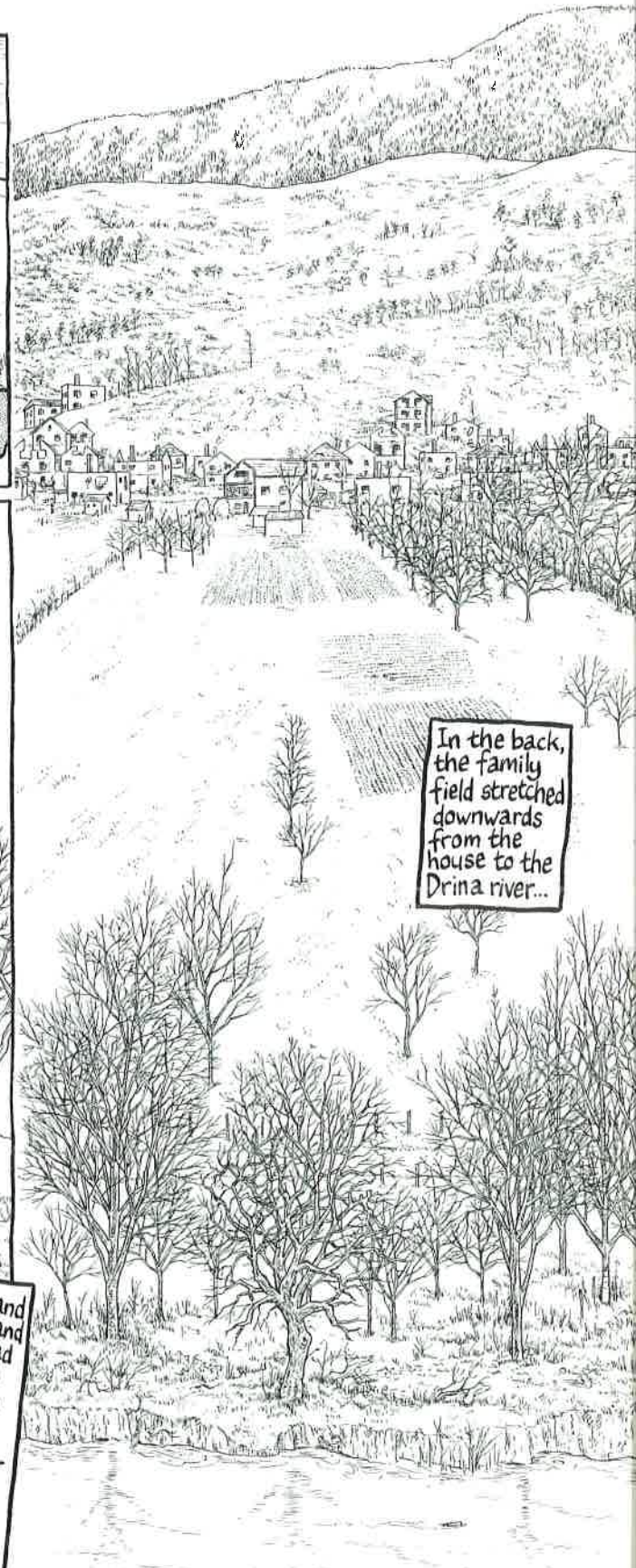
AND THERE WASN'T ANY ROOM DOWNTOWN. THERE WAS NO SPACE IN THE REFUGEE CENTERS. I LOOKED A LOT OF TIMES THERE.



Her neighborhood, Kokino Selo ("Chicken Village"), was home to refugees from all over eastern Bosnia who had escaped to Gorazde and found space to live only at its devastated fringes...

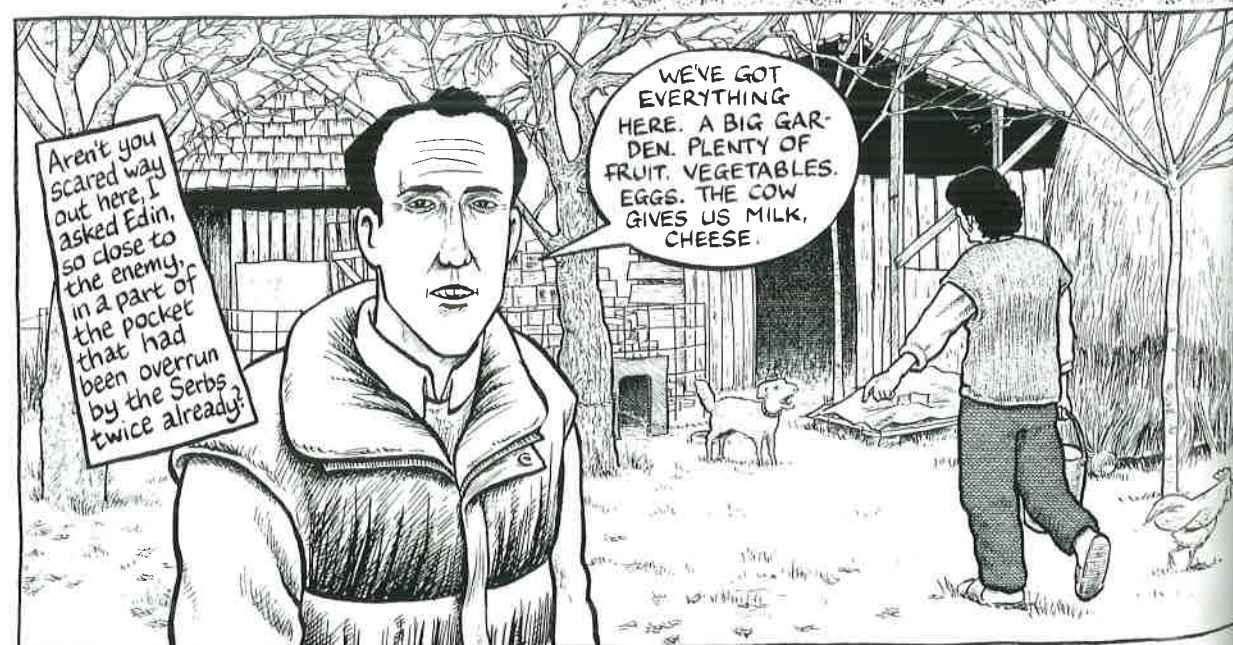
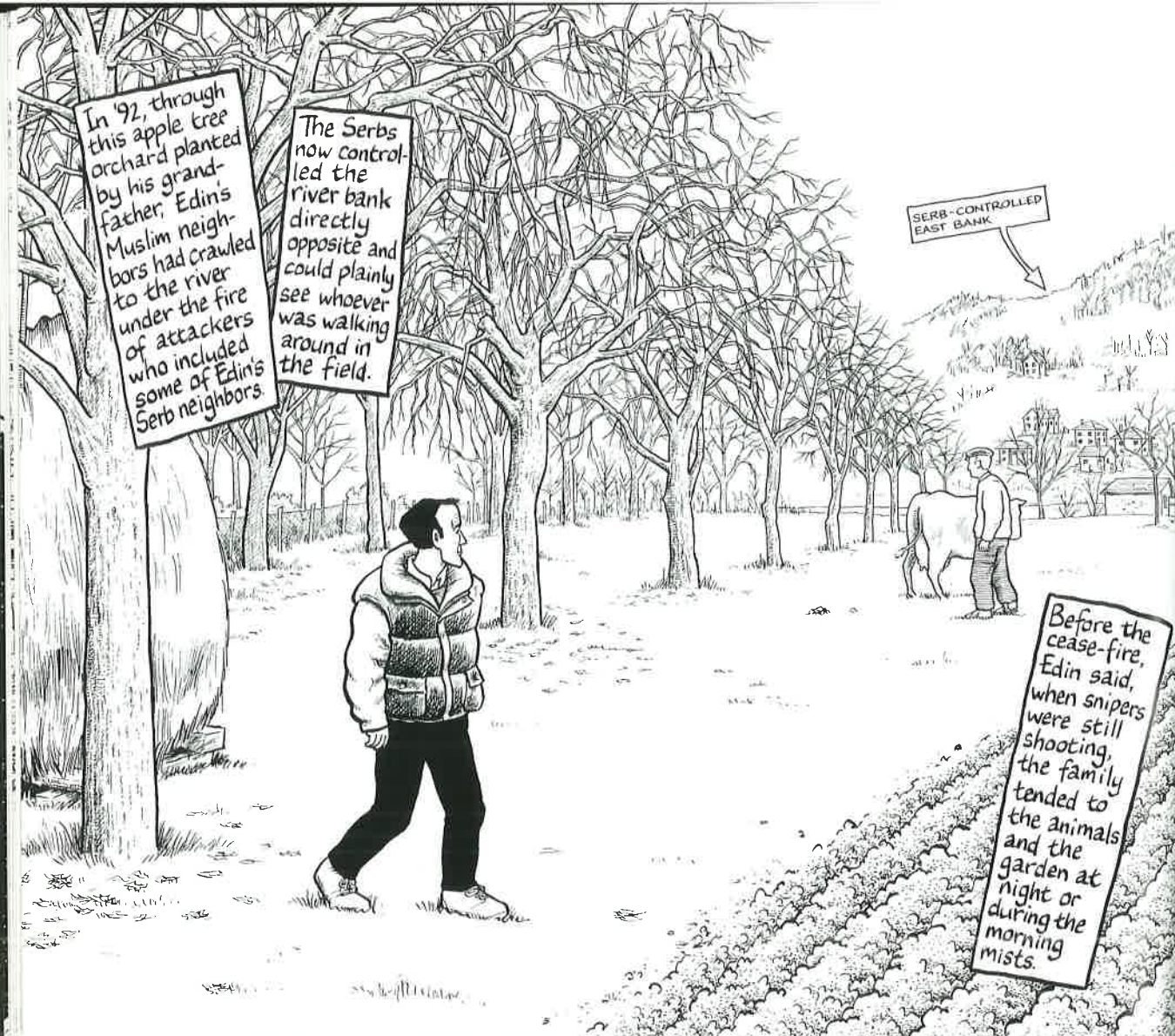


Edin was one of Kokino Selo's original inhabitants. He and his family lived in three houses from the checkpoint, on the fringe of Gorazde's fringes...



In the back, the family field stretched downwards from the house to the Drina river...





One evening, while Edin and I were sitting around digesting, she rushed in from the balcony. She could hear the Serbs singing across the river.



Edin and I stepped out there but couldn't hear a thing.

