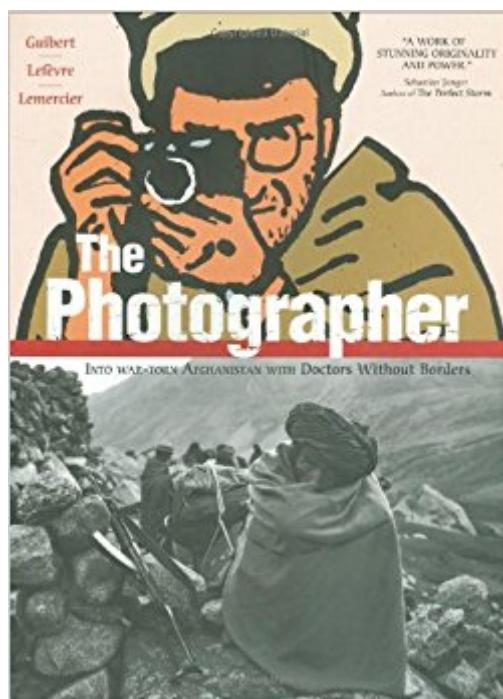


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The Photographer: Into War-torn Afghanistan With Doctors Without Borders



Synopsis

The Photographer Into War torn Afghanistan with Doctors Without Borders by Guibert, Emmanuel. Published by First Second,2009, Binding: Paperback

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Book Description In 1986, Afghanistan was torn apart by a war with the Soviet Union. This graphic novel/photo-journal is a record of one reporter's arduous and dangerous journey through Afghanistan accompanying the Doctors Without Borders. Didier Lefèvre's photography, paired with the art of Emmanuel Guibert, tells the powerful story of a mission undertaken by men and women dedicated to mending the wounds of war. Take a Look Inside The Photographer These color panels and striking landscapes document Didier Lefèvre's journey across the Hindu Kush mountains with Doctors Without Borders (click each image to see the full page). Mountain crossing with a caravan of horses and donkeys Clinic in northern Afghanistan's Yaftal Valley

Starred Review. This documentary graphic novel brings together starkly beautiful black and white photographs taken by Lefèvre, intimate drawings by Guibert, skillful design by Lemercier and a vibrant translation and thorough introduction by Siegel. In 1986, photographer Lefèvre was hired by Médecins sans Frontières (MSF; Doctors Without Borders), to document a mission into northern Afghanistan. Along the way, he and the doctors, guides and interpreters with whom he traveled endured physical hardship and the fracas of war. In one memorable scene, the group must

cross an open plateau where Russian planes fired on the previous MSF caravan. Photographs acting as panels emphasize the vast openness of the plateau, while drawings allow a glimpse of the small human gestures of the travelers. Arriving on the other side of the plateau, they reach a wooded area where, two years ago, they buried the man who didn't make it. This revelation is punctuated by a large photograph of the burial mound under the trees, the mix of drawings and photographs heightening the emotional impact. Originally published in three volumes in France, the book has sold more than 250,000 copies there, and the reach of this magnificent work promises to extend far beyond the graphic novel community. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

In *Collateral Damage*, Marianne Hirsch states that during the war in the Middle East, "a picture is worth a thousand words...before the power of visual images, the subject has an uncontrollable emotional response" (Hirsch 1209). During the current Iraq war, she argues, these thousand words have been systematically censored, informing the reader that "as soon as Americans were being wounded and killed in significant numbers...the dissemination of images was strictly controlled" (1210). In *The Photographer*, Didier Lefevre represents Afghanistan in the 1980s free from the controlling tethers of U.S. censorship as he attempts to take photographs constantly, honing his talent while he argues "'improving your pictures necessarily implies improving your relations with people'" (61). Thus, while Hirsch contends that "in the current media age our students (never mind our public officials) have lost their verbal literacy and have given themselves over to an overwhelmingly dominant, uncontrollable visuality that impairs thought" (1210), Lefevre takes pains to conjoin verbal and visual literacy to develop more meaningful relationships with the people he meets. He takes pictures, surely, but also thumbs through translation texts to adequately communicate and empathize with the Afghani people, especially later in the book when he is left without an interpreter (176). He must relate to his foreign audience by conforming to their expectations, stating that he is a Christian (171) though he makes a misstep in stating he does not have children (172). By using language in conjunction with his photography, Lefevre transcends his role as observer--his camera does not censor so much as it amplifies his experience of contact and integration into another culture. Although Hirsch tells us that "Like Beckett's characters we [humans] are...unable to articulate, in clear terms, the relation between images and words" (1212), Lefevre performs this task exceedingly well, including his photographs liberally throughout his work, yet splicing them together with graphic representations of the world around him. The photographic representation of the people Lefevre meets humanizes them, though the comic injections remind the

reader that they are perusing a subjective account, as Hirsch states that "Comics highlight both the individual frames and the space between them, calling attention to the compulsion to transcend the frame in an act of seeing...thus [revealing] the limited, obstructed vision that characterizes a historical moment ruled by trauma and censorship" (1213). Due to the included photographs, however, censorship breaks down in *The Photographer*. If, as Hirsch contends, "Vision is faulty mediated, unreliable, blocked" (1213), Didier Lefevre is attempting to remove that blockage through reproducing his vision in pure black and white, revealing landscapes (195), private prayer (200), and painful surgery (130-131) administered by the brave members of Doctors Without Borders. Lefevre's pictures allow for a removal of borders between reader and subject, aligned with Hirsch's statement that "The wounding effect of images blurs...boundaries...uniting rather than dividing victims, perpetrators, and bystanders in their embodied subjectivity" (1212). The perpetrating Russians are hardly seen in *The Photographer*, allowing the focal point to remain on the Afghani citizens and those stalwart doctors who yearn to assist them.

While told from photographer's point of view, but the story is told through a comic style images interspersed with actual black and white images (with one color image) taken through out the journey. Every page just pushing you to continue on, read it twice just to be sure I didn't miss anything the first time around and enjoyed reading it still.

The Photographer: Into War-Torn Afghanistan with Doctors Without Borders by Didier Lefèvre (the photojournalist), Emmanuel Guibert (the graphic artist) and Frédéric Lefèvre (the translator), translated from the French. A creative solution to a problem: what do you do with reels of stunning photos from the Russian-Afghan war after the talented photographer has died? Answer: use his proof sheets and journal notes and supplement them with graphic panels. This combination memoir of a naïf's first trip to the battlefield and his excellent and candid photos of DWB in action are augmented by "comic-strip" panels to fill in the blanks in the adventure. It works extremely well. It is, moreover, a good story that also deepens our understanding of Afghanistan while highlighting the modus operandi of dedicated NGO medical personnel in a war zone. Didier is young and innocent, and, thus, brave. He sets out to return from the field alone. He is kidnapped, robbed, close to death, in desperate straits before a local chieftain saves him. A dramatic story, well told. And, now that bloggers are running around the world reporting on trouble spots, this should be required preparatory reading so they don't blunder across boundaries and become the news themselves.

I'm usually not into illustrated book for history, but I got this book because Rory Stewart mentioned the photographer in one of his books and got me curious about him. Surprisingly, this photo and illustration collaboration is not that big of a distraction to the written consent which is pretty good.

Excellent, beautiful graphic novel following a photographer's harrowing, near-death journey into war-torn Afghanistan with Doctors Without Borders. Guibert captures the resilience of the people, the harsh terrain, the rugged fighters and the courageous team of doctors with extraordinary black and white photographs in this gripping, eye-witness journal account of his often terrifying experiences as a photojournalist in the midst of violent war.

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