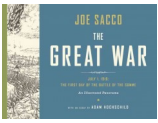


The Great War



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If you are a fan of graphic novels or comic book histories, Joe Sacco's incredibly detailed book about the battle of the Somme is a keeper. The accordion style of the book imparted a narrative push to this graphic history that has no text.

The folded-over 24 foot long drawing also gave Sacco a large expanse of space to record the planning for the war on the ramparts of Montreuil-sur-Mer, the gathering of horses, laden carts and howitzers before the battle, and the trenches, explosions and destruction of the battle itself. The artist also vividly captured the digging of graves and the field of white crosses after the bloodshed ended. Sacco's drawings are very accurate, expertly rendered, and they convey emotion. To get the full effect of this book, you should spread it out across a long table or even two tables.

The one-day battle had 60,000 British casualties—the largest of any battle Britain has been involved in before or since. Included in a separate booklet is Adam Hochschild's narrative essay that places the art in context.

Hochschild gathered lots of fascinating facts and statistics about the battle. First, rain delayed it for several days. Before the battle, British soldiers added 55 miles of new train tracks. Over 224,000 shells were shot in just one hour. The cacophony was so loud that civilians heard it in Hampstead Heath in London. And before the battle, hospitals in England were ordered to clear their wards of convalescents so that there would be room for the injured.

What a magnificent artist Sacco is. He manages to impart to the opening scenes the excitement and jollity of new recruits who have no idea about their destiny. Sacco also gave a sad and melancholic air to the trenches on the day of the battle itself. The world looked grey except for the white explosive clouds rising skyward. The only view of nature was a single copse of trees that stood out amid a ruined landscape. Later, Red Cross trucks and rows and rows of covered cots with corpses and the injured paint a stark reminder of war's reckoning.

For a nonfiction account of the war, read Adam Hochschild's *To End All War: a story of loyalty and rebellion: 1914-1918*. It concentrates on the moral issues that this very destructive war raised among those who favored it and those who opposed it in Great Britain.

Posted by Dory L. on January 29, 2014

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