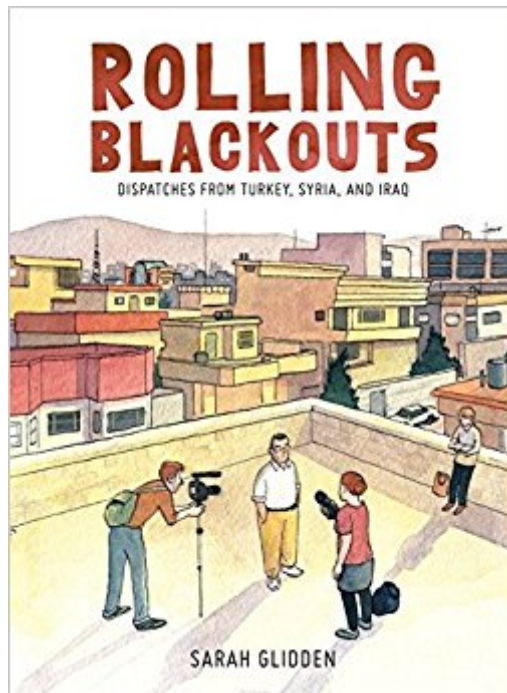




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Rolling Blackouts: Dispatches From Turkey, Syria, And Iraq



Synopsis

"Sarah Glidden's remarkable *Rolling Blackouts* adds a new twist to the [graphic journalism] form. Glidden accompanies a team of journalists through Syria and Iraq and her muted watercolours record not only the lives of people in war zones but the way the media interacts with them. Highly recommended." — *The Guardian*

Cartoonist Sarah Glidden accompanies her two friends — reporters and founders of a journalism non-profit — as they research potential stories on the effects of the Iraq War on the Middle East and, specifically, the war's refugees. Joining the trio is a childhood friend and former Marine whose past service in Iraq adds an unexpected and sometimes unwelcome viewpoint, both to the people they come across and perhaps even themselves. As the crew works their way through Turkey, Iraq, and Syria, Glidden observes the reporters as they ask civilians, refugees, and officials, "Who are you?" • Everyone has a story to tell: the Iranian blogger, the United Nations refugee administrator, a taxi driver, the Iraqi refugee deported from the US, the Iraqis seeking refuge in Syria, and even the American Marine. Glidden (*How to Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less*) records all that she encounters with a sympathetic and searching eye. Painted in her trademark soft, muted watercolors and written with a self-effacing humor, *Rolling Blackouts* cements Glidden's place as one of today's most original nonfiction voices.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"An ambitious, nuanced and sprawling work of graphic nonfiction." — *Rolling Stone*

Glidden's clean, spare cartoons take a behind-the-scenes

approach." "Harper's Magazine" Sarah Glidden's remarkable *Rolling Blackouts* adds a new twist to the [graphic journalism] form. Glidden accompanies a team of journalists through Syria and Iraq and her muted watercolours record not only the lives of people in war zones but the way the media interacts with them. Highly recommended." "The Guardian" "[Glidden's] technique, combined with dozens of hand-painted snapshots of each of her subjects, feels more personal than simply text or images alone. By making these experiences feel so personal, Ms Glidden has helped to emphasize the seriousness of their struggle." "The Economist" "Rolling Blackouts is...meticulous, probing...at once a densely layered reckoning with the region's complex politics, as well as an inquiry into journalistic methods." "The Globe and Mail" "An intricate investigation of how the reality of conflict gets filtered through personal, political, and journalistic narrative...This work is quiet but challenging, plain yet beautiful" "exemplifies [Glidden's] skillful, sensitive reportage." "Library Journal Starred Review" "Glidden does a brilliant job in chronicling a two-month journey with journalist friends through Turkey, Syria, and Iraq to report stories about the impact of the Iraq War on Middle Eastern inhabitants...The power of Glidden's narrative is in how it asks fundamental questions about what journalism is, what kinds of stories it tells, and what purpose these stories serve. She also manages to crystallize hours of recorded interviews with the locals into insightful discussions of complex situations." "Publishers Weekly"

Sarah Glidden's debut book, *How to Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less* landed on several best of the year lists, including *Entertainment Weekly*; earned a YALSA Great Graphic Novels for Teens distinction; and won an Ignatz Award. A graduate of Boston University, she now lives in Seattle.

Ordered for my son for his summer reading prior to 11th grade

This book is an absolute delight. From the carefully written account of several independent journalists going into some dangerous regions, to the beautiful watercolor art, it all adds up to a great reading experience. I wish more serious graphics novels like this were published. They take the genre to a new level. I am also going to check Glidden's previous book, *How to Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less*.

Frankly, I had doubts about Sarah Glidden's decision to use "comic panels" to tell the intriguing story of her visit to Turkey, Syria,

and Iraq with her two journalist friends and a friend of theirs who just happened to have seen military action in Iraq as an American soldier. I have read two or three graphic novels and enjoyed the way that the panels added to the overall emotional impact of the novels, but *Rolling Blackouts* is my first experience with graphic nonfiction. I am happy to report that Glidden made it all work very well. Now I can't decide which impresses me more, the sheer number of Glidden's wonderful illustrations (I estimate there to be at least 2,500 of the comic panels) or the amount of information she packed into them. Sarah Stuteville and Alex Stonehall, along with Jessica Partnow, created what Stuteville calls a "multimedia journalism collective" to cover the stories that the established news organizations never seemed to have time for, stories they never covered. The collective's first venture was a six-month trip through Thailand, Cambodia, Pakistan, India, Israel, Palestine, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan where they covered almost thirty stories of their own choosing, stories that were often picked up by "news sites, magazines, and public radio stations." Now, Sarah and Alex are embarking on a two-month venture into Turkey, Syria, and Iraq to speak with some of the people most affected by the Iraq War, those almost countless refugees forced to flee their homes because of the fighting. Sarah Glidden, armed only with a camera and a digital voice recorder, and Dan O'Brien, armed only with his memories of the Iraq War, join them. Sarah Stuteville and Dan O'Brien were childhood friends who had not seen each other for a number of years. Stuteville expected that by returning to Iraq, the scene of his military service, her old friend would do the kind of deep soul-searching that would lend itself to a meaningful video documentary piece. What she found instead, and what deeply frustrated her, is that O'Brien simply refused to play that game. O'Brien figured out what she expected of him early on, and although he felt guilty about letting her down, he could never bring himself to discuss his experience in any meaningful way. As the four young people cross various international borders, Glidden manages to illustrate a bit of each country's history and political status. The group's reception by the people they speak with and formally interview is exactly what one would hope for: friendly, but serious. The displaced people they approach are generally very willing (sometimes even eager) to speak with them despite the way they express anger at the U.S. government and blame America for the loss of homes, family members, and friends. Stuteville and Stonehall come home with the kind of stories they went looking for, but come to realize that journalism is not really about "changing things" and never was. According to Stuteville the important thing is to get the story "out

there's a hope that it gets "passed along." Then, according to her, "The way the reader uses that story to understand the world is up to them." Bottom Line: Rolling Blackouts manages to pack in more factual information than I expected from graphic nonfiction genre. It is more effective, however, when illustrating the emotions of the interviewer and those being interviewed. Sarah Glidden's illustrations (she calls them "comics") are truly wonderful and they greatly add to the book's emotional impact on the reader. This one was a pleasant surprise.

I heard about Sarah Glidden's *Rolling Blackouts: Dispatches from Turkey, Syria, and Iraq* on NPR's Book Concierge. Glidden traveled to the Middle East with some friends who work as independent journalists. They spent several weeks talking to displaced Iraqis and other individuals and trying to think of ways to pitch stories to news organizations back home. They work on two main stories - one about Dan, an Iraqi veteran who is returning to the region for the first time and wants to talk to Iraqis who lived through the war, and one about Sam, an Iraqi refugee who found his way to Seattle with his family, somehow ended up in the 9/11 Commission report, and was deported back to Iraq. Much of Glidden's story, though, focuses on her journalist friends, and the work they do. It's no secret that news organizations have significantly reduced their foreign staff, and that reporting has suffered as a result. There are very few reporters abroad with long-term contacts, and so they cannot report on longer-term, slower burn stories. We understand the world less because of it. Governments are more corrupt because of it. Reporters are less safe because of it. We are all less accountable to each other, from individuals to governments to multi-national corporations, because of it. Glidden's book highlights some of this loss to us. She shows us an Iraq that suffered through war but still has culture, friendship, delicious food, and beauty. Some Iraqis are happy that Americans came, mostly because they suffered deeply under Saddam Hussein. Others hate Americans for ruining their way of life. I really enjoyed the way Glidden's friends shared stories of Iraqis in multiple countries to provide a broader perspective. I also liked the way Glidden used light, bright colors in her art to humanize the experience of so many people whose lives have been upended so completely. Not only the Iraqi refugees themselves, but the lives of the Turks and Syrians as well. It was particularly chilling to read the Syrian section of this book, as I was reading it while the US bombed Syria after Assad used chemical weapons on his own people. The book is set some years ago, I think before the full horrors of the Syrian war. Now I realize just how much the world missed by not having reporters in Syria to cover Assad, so that it felt as though the whole war came out of nowhere. (At

least, it felt that way to me. No doubt others were better informed.)I was less enamored with the story around Dan, the Iraqi war veteran. I feel like his return to Iraq and his opacity in sharing his feelings and whether his feelings about the war and his participation in it took up an outsize amount of the story. In a way, it felt very "Yes, of course, focus on the white guy's story because that would be the most compelling to everyone." I don't think that is fair to Glidden's reporter friends, but it seemed like Glidden wanted to focus the most on that story. She even ends that story arc quite dramatically, with something like, "Sarah never interviewed Dan again" as the only words on a whole page. Which makes it sound like either Sarah or Dan died, but neither of them did, and they continued to stay friends and talk to each other, she just didn't interview him again about the war. That aside, though, I really appreciated Glidden's book and her focus on how journalists make decisions on stories, angles, ethics, and so many other things. It was very illuminating, and I highly recommend seeking it out if you enjoy Joe Sacco's work or Brooke Gladstone's *The Influencing Machine*.

4.5 stars. It really should be required reading for Americans. It's easy to be detached when we think of them as "those people" or that's "over there" or as some Backward desert people that we liberated from a dictator. It gets a lot more complex once it's personalized. Once we see an educated not religious middle class that could be somewhere in Long Island now displaced and marginalized, oh yeah, that's our doing as the great "liberator", you can't help but feel a sense of responsibility and even sadness that we are so detached from what happened. Doesn't attempt to be political but merely to put a voice to the voiceless. In the end, I still don't know if the invasion was the right thing (good for Kurds but bad for those in Baghdad) but at least we can give it some thought rather than have it be some side news story.

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