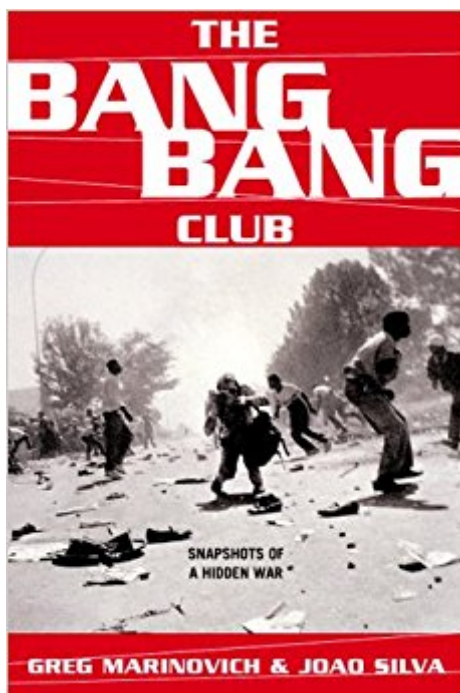


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The Bang-Bang Club: Snapshots From A Hidden War



Synopsis

The Bang-Bang Club is the story of four young photographers who covered the last years of apartheid, taking many of the most memorable photographs of the period. In this stunning new book, the group's two surviving members recount their political, emotional, and personal journeys through these violent years as South Africa moved toward democracy. Along the way we accompany them on free-lance assignments to other war-torn regions, including the former Yugoslavia and the Sudan, where one member of the group shoots what has become a world-famous photograph of a starving child stalked by a vulture. The boldness that earned the group its nickname, that prompted them to rush headlong into dangerous situations in pursuit of an image, forces them to consider difficult questions that lie at the heart of their work: When does their sense of humanity overwhelm their ambition and professional duties? When do they put aside their cameras and their impartiality and get involved? These are the moral dilemmas that the Bang-Bang Club grappled with on a daily basis.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Most people, upon hearing gunfire, would run away and hide. Conflict photojournalists have the opposite reaction: they actually look for trouble, and when they find it, get as close as possible and stand up to get the best shot. This thirst for the shot and the seeming nonchalance to the risks entailed earned Greg Marinovich, Joao Silva, Ken Oosterbroek, and Kevin Carter the moniker of the Bang-Bang Club. Oosterbroek was killed in township violence just days before South Africa's

historic panracial elections. Carter, whose picture of a Sudanese child apparently being stalked by a vulture won him a Pulitzer Prize, killed himself shortly afterwards. Another of their posse, Gary Bernard, who had held Oosterbroek as he died, also committed suicide. The Bang-Bang Club is a memoir of a time of rivalry, comradeship, machismo, and exhilaration experienced by a band of young South African photographers as they documented their country's transition to democracy. We forget too easily the political and ethnic violence that wracked South Africa as apartheid died a slow, spasmodic death. Supporters of the ANC and Inkatha fought bloody battles every day. The white security forces were complicit in fomenting and enabling some of the worst violence. All the while, the Bang-Bang Club took pictures. And while they did, they were faced with the moral dilemma of how far they should go in pursuit of an image, and whether there was a point at which they should stop their shooting and try to intervene. This is a riveting and appalling book. It is simply written--these guys are photographers, not writers--but extremely engaging. They were adrenaline junkies who partied hard and prized the shot above all else. None of them was a hero; these men come across as overweeningly ambitious, egotistical, reckless, and selfish, though also brave and even principled. As South Africans, they were all invested in their country's future, even though, as whites, they were strangers in their own land as they covered the Hostel wars in the black townships. The mixture of the romantic appeal of the war correspondent with honest assessments of their personal failings is part of what makes this account so compelling and so singular among books of its ilk. --J. Riches

Four white South African photographers (Marinovich, Silva, Kevin Carter and Greg Oosterbroek) decide to chronicle the years of violenceAostensibly "black on black" violence but actually apartheid-sanctioned violence aimed at destabilizing the ANCAthat marked the time from Nelson Mandela's release from prison to the first nonracial elections in their land. Before those years passed, two of them would be dead (one by his own hand), and their lives would be forever changed (" 'I was appalled at what they were doing. I was appalled at what I was doing' "). Heard and seen almost entirely through the voice and eyes of Marinovich, this memoir is about, in the words of Archbishop Tutu, the "remarkably cool, no, even cold-blooded" photographers who negotiated a war zone for journalistic gain and not the war itself. Although compelling, their story suffers from a lack of hard-core introspection. Even if the reader can understand the photographers' almost aloof response to the violence and death around them as they seek out bloodbaths and bodies, their manifest coldness (evidenced by both their words and their photographs) remains undeniably disturbing. For example, in one telling scene, after taking pictures of a young man who

was killed and burned, Silva takes his friends to see the scene. While they look at the still-smoldering body, a woman comes out from a house nearby and throws a blanket over the body and looks at them in disgust. And when Marinovich and Oosterbroek are injured in a shoot-out, Oosterbroek fatally, their description of the events only accentuates their dispassionate point of view ("the ethic of getting the picture first, then dealing with the rest later"). B&w photos. Radio satellite tour. (Oct.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This disturbing book must be taken in context. The chaos of apartheid, the 35 mm photography of the day. The violence, the drugs, and the angst. The book sucks you in, and every now and then it spits you back out so you can breathe. Marinovch and Silva (mostly Marinovich, I think) create the swirl of smoke and danger that goes with combat photography. The descriptions of their assignments are vivid and at times heart stopping. They let you feel the physical and emotional toll of being under fire. Awards and prizes they win along the way fade into the haze of what they need to do to themselves to get by. The realization that those "reliefs" are as damaging as the horrors of human violence become evident. We recoil from so much of what war photography depicts, and if you have a sense of art at all you admire the men and women to take those photos. This will let you know some of them, and what they went through to make those images.

Disturbing in a multitude of ways, this book offers a view of South Africa's "troubles" through the lens of adrenaline junkie photojournalists. It also offers a look at what constant exposure to violence and suffering of all kinds has on the human psyche of those who bear witness to it. Tough questions rise, not the least of which is the ethics involved in profiting from the suffering of others.

This is a difficult book to read. Stylistically it's well written, but the subject matter is bleak. It is a story of a country that is pulled in so many directions by the factions and ideologies and alliances and bloodlines that twist in on each other. And it is a story that confronts head-on the notion of what an individual can do to make a difference. There are no simple answers or neat happy endings. This is a book I would highly recommend though, if for no other reason than to gain an insight into the people behind the images that we see in our news media. It is easy to forget that while a story may only pass touch our lives for a few minutes, the journalists and photographers who seek them out will carry the memories with them for a lifetime.

One of the best books I have ever read. Material sticks with you and lingers. I got a copy for a

friend, and have let friends thumb through it. You say you are going to read just a few pages, but hours past before you put it down. Conversations with people who have read this book are never boring. I would highly recommend this book. BTW, stay away from the movie. The movie did not do this book justice.

This is a book truly deserving of a five star rating. It clears up a lot of the controversy surrounding the suicide of Pulitzer winner Kevin Carter. It is a well written and intimate insider view of the emergence of democracy in South Africa and the end of apartheid. It is well illustrated and has a very practical glossary. It is tremendous value for the reader and it will not disappoint.

This book is interesting reading for anyone into adventure photography. There are no great pictures to look at. There are a few pictures but they are of such poor quality print that they are more like hand drawings. Buy it for the reading, not for the pictures. I do recommend the movie or video of the same subject and name.

It is a master piece that depicts so well the struggle and the determination of photo journalists who decided to bond together to tell the story of South Africa during its darkest days.

I thought the kindle version had no images, but they are in the middle of the book. I'm assuming the paperback is the same way, but when the book refers to images early on, I thought they were missing. I don't "flip" through books on digital devices like I would a paper copy. Other than this initial confusion, the book is great!

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