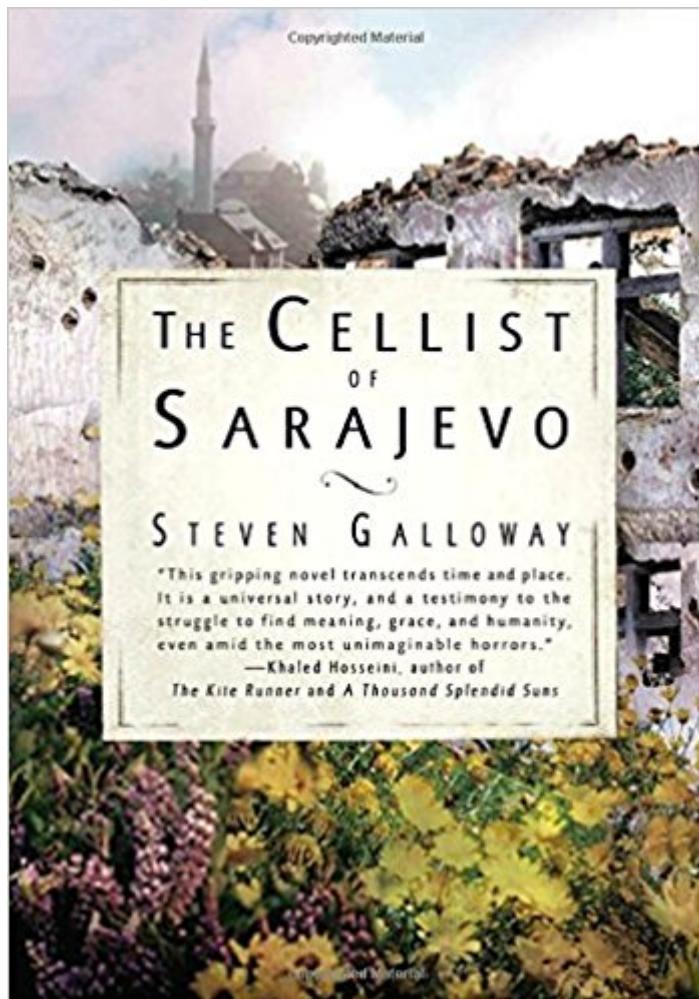


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# The Cellist Of Sarajevo



## Synopsis

A spare and haunting, wise and beautiful novel about war and the endurance of the human spirit and the subtle ways individuals reclaim their humanity. In a city under siege, four people whose lives have been upended are ultimately reminded of what it is to be human. From his window, a musician sees twenty-two of his friends and neighbors waiting in a breadline. Then, in a flash, they are killed by a mortar attack. In an act of defiance, the man picks up his cello and decides to play at the site of the shelling for twenty-two days, honoring their memory. Elsewhere, a young man leaves home to collect drinking water for his family and, in the face of danger, must weigh the value of generosity against selfish survivalism. A third man, older, sets off in search of bread and distraction and instead runs into a long-ago friend who reminds him of the city he thought he had lost, and the man he once was. As both men are drawn into the orbit of cello music, a fourth character — a young woman, a sniper — holds the fate of the cellist in her hands. As she protects him with her life, her own army prepares to challenge the kind of person she has become. A novel of great intensity and power, and inspired by a true story, *The Cellist of Sarajevo* poignantly explores how war can change one's definition of humanity, the effect of music on our emotional endurance, and how a romance with the rituals of daily life can itself be a form of resistance.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Canadian Galloway (Ascension) delivers a tense and haunting novel following four people trying to survive war-torn Sarajevo. After a mortar attack kills 22 people waiting in line to buy bread, an unnamed cellist vows to play at the point of impact for 22 days. Meanwhile, Arrow, a young woman

sniper, picks off soldiers; Kenan makes a dangerous trek to get water for his family; and Dragan, who sent his wife and son out of the city at the start of the war, works at a bakery and trades bread in exchange for shelter. Arrow's assigned to protect the cellist, but when she's eventually ordered to commit a different kind of killing, she must decide who she is and why she kills. Dragan believes he can protect himself through isolation, but that changes when he runs into a friend of his wife's attempting to cross a street targeted by snipers. Kenan is repeatedly challenged by his fear and a cantankerous neighbor. All the while, the cellist continues to play. With wonderfully drawn characters and a stripped-down narrative, Galloway brings to life a distant conflict. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Inspired by Vedran Smailovic, the cellist who, in 1992, played in a bombed-out Sarajevo square for 22 days in memory of the 22 people who were killed by a mortar attack, this is a novel about four people trying to maintain a semblance of their humanity in the besieged city. Kenan trudges across the city to collect water from the brewery for his family; on his way to buy bread, Dragan meets an old friend who reminds him of life before the war; Arrow, a sniper fighting against the occupation, is charged with keeping the cellist alive; and the cellist himself, in his simple act of performing, courageously brings a touch of life back to the citizens. Although Galloway's characters weigh the value of their lives against the choices they must make, he effectively creates a fifth character in the city itself, capturing the details among the rubble and destruction that give added weight to his memorable novel. --Elliot Mandel --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Mr. Galloway has created a sonorous piece in this novel. Like a theme and variations, the story repeats, enlarging the original melody with each iteration, adding layer upon layer of color to the people, the city of Sarajevo, to the story of the siege. It is both a story of survival and of destruction. The relentless nature of the siege, the unbelievable pressure and stress imposed by the constant risk of death or, if not death, then the loss of one's sense of self, of humanness, makes the novel strangely intimate and tedious at the same time. How many times can we watch and wait with a man or woman as he/she decides when to cross a street? See memories of happier times flood their minds with temporary reprieve? Hear the haunting melody of the title character? When you reach the end of this book, you won't be surprised to know the answer: forever.

Though the story is set during a very specific period with known combatants, the author focuses on

the impact on the individuals without reference to their cultural or religious identity. Three of the 4 key individuals are fictional but highly developed. They are portrayed as ordinary people placed in a horrible situation in which they all examine their lives and their actions.

Brief summary and review, no spoilers. This novel takes place during the siege of Sarajevo in the early 1990s. It is told from the viewpoint of four different characters. The first character - and we only read his POV briefly - is from a cellist who is living in Sarajevo during its siege during the Bosnian War. He witnesses the death of 22 people who are blown up while waiting in a line for bread at a bakery. He decides that he is going to go out in the streets and play his cello every day for 22 days - to honor those 22 who died. This is a very dangerous undertaking since there are snipers everywhere and the streets are not safe for anyone. The second POV is from a character named Arrow. She is a young woman who has a special gift; she is an extraordinary sniper. She has been recruited to help defend the city by some rather mysterious government officials. She goes by the name Arrow because she doesn't want anyone to know her real name and because it is easier for her to kill this way; she isn't herself. Arrow is an honest and seemingly decent young woman who has been put into an impossible moral and physical situation. The chapters with Arrow are some of my favorites of the book. The third character is Kenan. He is the father of three young children and he must go out every 4 days and collect water for his family and for the fussy old woman who lives downstairs. This requires him to go long distances and skirt dangerous sniper fire as well as bombs and other dangers. He remembers a time when he didn't live this way and when they were able to take having clean water and electricity and safety for granted. The last POV character is a 64 year old man named Dragan. He is a baker and under normal circumstances he would be near retirement. As it is he is lucky to work at the bakery because he is able to eat. Still, he has to get to the bakery via the dangerous streets of Sarajevo. Dragan lives with his sister and cantankerous brother-in-law because his own place had been destroyed. He sent his wife and son away to Italy just time - before the siege - but now is lonely and wishes he could join them. As we switch from one character to another this book really and truly educates us about what happened during the siege of Sarajevo (from 1992 -1996.) In fact the city itself almost becomes a character as the devastation and the deprivation felt by the people within is brought to life. Whereas the city was once beautiful and thriving and a tourist destination, during the siege it was incredibly dangerous and many people were either killed or suffered because of the lack of food, medication and from the constant explosions and sniper fire. I read this novel for my book club and I'm really glad it was selected. I was surprised by how little I knew about the siege and it was an eye-opening read for me. It's one of

those books that you read that truly changes you; you finish it and you're so appreciative of the things that make life easy for us and for the simple fact that we feel safe. We just take those things for granted and it's books like this that remind us of our good fortune and how'd we feel if it all changed. One of the things the author does so well is make us empathize with these characters and ultimately realize that the heroes are not necessarily the ones who are "brave" in battle, but the everyday people who still try to keep their principals and decency during times of great moral and physical crisis. Highly recommended. You can easily read this novel in one sitting and it's a page-turner for sure. It also has one of the best closing lines ever and I was very moved when I turned the last page.

We are deep in the city of Sarajevo during the 1990s siege. The book follows 3 characters - a man braving gunfire to get water for his family, a man braving gunfire to get bread for his family, and a female sniper for the resistance. Their stories revolve around a cellist - a tragic figure who comes out into the bombed-out street daily to play a haunting song. The street had been shelled and 22 people died while waiting in line for bread. So he vows to play for 22 days. The story and characters are fiction, but based on an actual event in the Siege of Sarajevo, where a cellist did come out and play to honor people killed by a shell that hit there. Each of the characters interacts with other citizens while they strive to accomplish their tasks. There are enemy snipers on the hills around the city, and taking cover behind burned-out vehicles and racing across open streets is a life and death battle daily to get something to eat or drink. It is a dark and haunting story.

Thought provoking and sensitive . Powerful understanding of what keeps us alive. I purchased this book while visiting this area and seeing the damage and amazing life....markets, music in the streets, lovely squares with families enjoying life. I visited the museum's and heard the filmed stories spoken by those who were once young, innocent and then brutalized by this holocaust of sorts. Well written in that it captures the numb pain.

A fast, depressing read that painstakingly illustrates and describes man's unending inhumanity to man. Each breath could be one's last, each move could bring death. How does and can one retain one's moral and ethical values under such circumstances? Does right and wrong change or does it remain the same? The author follows these themes and many more through the daily lives of three individuals. Their stories will haunt you and not release you. And over all is the powerful theme of music. Music embracing the soul, comforting, soothing, giving peace, granting strength, and

restoring humanity.

"Seige" conjures up images of medieval castles, but the Seige of Sarajevo lasted four years in the 1990s . Galloway weaves his story of several characters struggling to survive under conditions once unthinkable in the lovely city that hosted the Olympics in the 80s. Each character slowly realizes how the war warps one's sense of reality and morality. The cellist, making a seemingly absurd and wasteful gesture in the ravaged city, touches all who hear his music. How will they respond? The book's relevance to modern day Syria, and indeed anytime human beings struggle to preserve hope in the face of savagery, makes it a must read.

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