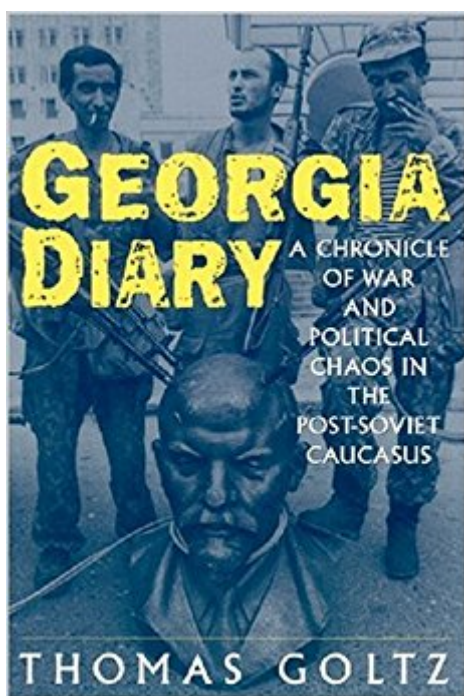


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Georgia Diary: A Chronicle Of War And Political Chaos In The Post-Soviet Caucasus



Synopsis

The author of the acclaimed "Azerbaijan Diary and Chechnya Diary" now recounts his experiences in the strife-ridden Republic of Georgia. Soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Republic of Georgia fell prey to a series of power struggles, rampant crime and corruption, secessionist wars, and the spillover of the war in neighboring Chechnya. Journalist Goltz traces these developments with the same kind of vivid, personal narrative that made his previous books so compelling. This fast-paced, first-person account is filled with fascinating details about the ongoing struggles of this little-known region of the former Soviet Union. Featuring memorable portraits of individuals in high places and low, it traces the story from 1992 through the "Rose Revolution," the resignation of Eduard Shevardnadze, and the new presidency of U.S.-educated Mikhail Saakashvili.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Goltz does it again, this time serving up a rollicking personal account of the formation and crisis of independent Georgia." -- Frederick Starr, Chairman, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Washington
"He is an open-eyed observer and compelling storyteller." -- Kenneth M. Jensen, Executive Director, American Committee on Foreign Relations
"The latest, highly entertaining installment of Thomas Goltz's rip-roaring travels around the Caucasus." -- Fiona Hill, The Brookings Institution
"The third installment in Thomas Goltz's Caucasian diary series is arguably the best written of the three." -- Svante Cornell, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, John Hopkins University
"Written by a true friend of the region, a brave soul, and a heck of a good story-teller. -- EurasiaNet

A gripping account of Georgia since the fall of the Soviet Union. Goltz achieves a good balance between the adventure of his personal experiences in the area, and the historical, cultural and political background of his subject matter. It's very enlightening without ever feeling academic, and very lively without ever feeling indulgent. Having traveled in Georgia and lived in Abkhazia in '98-'99, the 'travelogue' aspect of the book brought back vivid memories, and rang true to what I saw and experienced. What I lacked then, but Goltz provides in spades, is a broader historical background and analysis of Georgian history and the Abkhazian conflict (Goltz is obviously well-read in a number of disciplines, and vividly draws on cultural as well and political history). Though definitely in the realm of 'war porn', Goltz' account is nonetheless refreshingly light and humorous - there's a boyish 'oh boy' quality to his writing, unlike the heavier adolescent angst and drama evident in most 'war porn'. (On a such a contentious subject, there is probably no way to devise an objectivity that satisfies all parties, but as someone with no dog in the fight, his account strikes me as scrupulously objective) Heartily recommended - a vivid, easy read, but with real depth.

This book was obviously a side-project for Goltz who was much more interested in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict in Azerbaijan. His work "Azerbaijan Diary" was much better written and researched but was still a very biased view and Georgia Diary is a very incomplete picture of the conflicts in Post Soviet Georgia.

Incorporates a vast wealth of detail into a narrative that nevertheless remains lucid, engaging, and highly entertaining. Plenty to offer both the specialist and the general reader. Great preparation for anyone traveling to Georgia.

Let's face it: Goltz can write newspaper copy but not books. Every single one has been a dud--lots of topical promise, no stylistic detonation; lots of bravery and unique access to very interesting places and people, but no delivery. Which is frustrating. If we believe the overly direct explanations, his experiences in the Caucasus meant very much to him, and yet he fails to create even one poignant moment out of them. Instead, like the worst kind of self-aggrandizing hipster, he goes on and on about he was there before everyone else and witnessed the 'bad old days', and like a tabloid writer he sprints through the book without the levity and literary reflection which make Michael Herr or Anna Badkhen or even Hemingway exceptional writers about times of conflict. Goltz's characterizations are consummately unoriginal, the landscape is almost non-existent, and the

smells and sounds of these places are put before you in high school short story-level declarative sentences. Nor is there any sense of history soaked into the text, just catty received opinions and ground-level siphoning. At best you will close the book with a drifting, incomplete sense of what life in Georgia was like at the time. I've never needed to put so much effort into mentally finishing an author's job that I did with this book. Mr Goltz, should he ever write another book, would do better to either decide who his audience is and write directly to them, or admit he doesn't know who the audience is, and so approach the subject without insider references, journalistic cliches, and personal firewater that no one outside of his friends would be interested in. Even the fascinating mystery of the Freddy Woodruff's death is made flat, though somewhere in there you get the sense it really touched him. The Caucasus very much needs English-language scholars, critics, advocates, and people like Goltz who are brave enough to do in and do the dirty work. But Thomas Goltz just as badly needs a ghostwriter.

For a few years, a friend of mine (who happens to be an old friend of the author) has been recommending this book (and the other two in the trilogy) and I've been meaning to read it, but I always set it aside for another time. Another time finally came and I was blown away. Before reading it, I had no clue how important -- strategically maybe but symbolically definitely -- Georgia is in the geopolitical chess match. What I thought would be the story of a small nation turned out to be the story of all the world. It's been less than a year since Russia and Georgia fought a brief war at the start of the Olympics, yet it seems like much longer because the news cycle rolled over and past Georgia long ago. The one question I had last summer, the one that CNN either could not or would not answer, was: What exactly are they fighting for? After reading "Georgia Diary," I might forgive CNN because the situation is so complicated (but fascinating) that they would still be trying to explain it today. I highly recommend this book; you will not only learn the answer to the question, but you will also walk away with so much more.

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