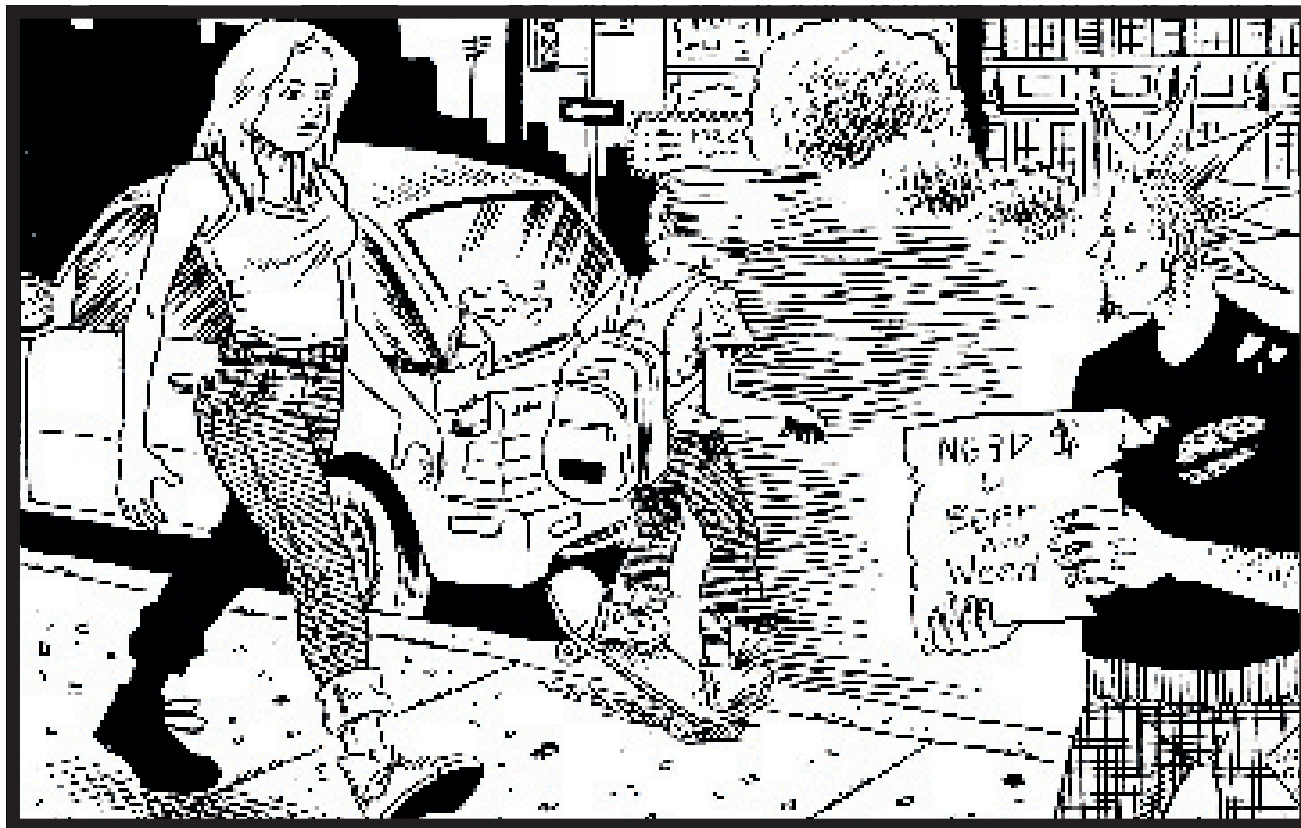


Q&A



Harvey Pekar Gives Peace a Chance

He follows *American Splendor* with the story of a young woman's war against war. Interview by Jeff Newelt

For 30 years, Harvey Pekar has been mining magic out of the mundane while writing *American Splendor*, his unadorned slice-of-life comic series. Pekar's stories are proto-Seinfeldian celebrations of the ordinary that found their way on-screen in the 2003 film *American Splendor*, starring Paul Giamatti as Pekar and Pekar as himself. His latest offering, the politically tinged *Macedonia* (Villard), drawn by Ed Piskor, documents coauthor Heather Roberson's journey to the Balkans.

How different is it writing history compared to your usual autobiography? Is it more difficult?
It's pretty easy; I get the information from the horse's mouth. When I write autobiographical comics, I write down what my brain dictates and turn that into stick-figure scripts. When I do biographical comics, I work like

Studs Terkel, with a whole bunch of questions.

What made you decide to tell Heather Roberson's story?

I met her in 2004 when I was speaking at the University of Missouri. I was a guest of her sister, Holly, and Heather came to visit. Heather started telling me about this beef she had with people who say that war is inevitable. She said, "No, it's not inevitable—and one place where it did not happen is Macedonia, and I'm going over there to write my thesis on it." I'm real interested in history and haven't had much opportunity to write about it

"I wanted to write from the standpoint that you can avoid war."

before, so I told her when she goes there, take notes, because I might wanna do something on that. So she went there for several weeks, and lo and behold I get 150 pages of notes—she even wrote down full conversations! So it was easy for me to break it down and translate it into comic form. In fact, I put her name on the cover, and I copyrighted the book in both our names.

Joe Sacco, who has drawn for you in the past, did great comics about the Balkans. Were those an influence?

Well, Joe is a fantastic artist; but as I call out in the comic, Sacco wrote about war in the Balkans, and I wanted to write something where war wasn't the focus. He's a war junkie who's into portraying the actual violence. I'm not, so I wanted to write about it from the standpoint that you *can* avoid war—and here is an example of it. There is no violence in the book. Another theme is how women are hassled all the time. When Heather goes to Belgrade and Serbia, a taxi driver gives her a real pain in the ass. So a big part of the story was her intrepidity and unwillingness to play it safe. She went over there without writing letters or getting introductions in advance.