



# **Dancing in the No-fly Zone: A Woman's Journey Through Iraq**

*Hadani Ditmars*

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When Hadani Ditmars first went to Iraq in 1997 for the New York Times, she was shocked at what she saw. Six years of the worst sanctions ever inflicted on a modern nation had brought the people to their knees. Yet there was so much more to the "cradle of civilization" than misery and suffering. In the midst of despair she found art, beauty, architecture, music. She discovered orchestras who played impassioned symphonies on wrecked instruments, playwrights who pushed the limits of censorship, artists who spent their last dinars on paint and canvas, families who still celebrated weddings by dancing to maqam-traditional love songs.

Ditmars travelled to Iraq again and again, reporting on every aspect of life. In September 2003, she returned to Baghdad to find the people she had met over the years and see what had become of them since the U.S. "liberation." *Dancing In The No-Fly Zone* is the story of that trip, interwoven with tales from her earlier visits and of the people she met along the way: actors and artists, mercenaries and businessmen, street kids and sufis, even the "king in waiting." It includes a visit to Abu Ghraib prison, in which Ditmars is given a tour of the Saddam-era execution chamber by the U.S. general who was later dismissed after the abuse scandal broke.

As the situation worsens and the violence intensifies, Ditmars spends a miraculous evening with a group of Iraqis who sing and dance along to a performance of maqam. A people who have suffered so much yet maintain such resilience deserve to have the full depth of their humanity portrayed. Hadani Ditmars captures this spirit in *Dancing in the No-Fly Zone*.

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