

literary fiction

Hello Sasha

Novel. AST. Moscow 2022. 180 pages

Awards: Book of the Year 2022, Yasnaya Polyana Award 2022 (sponsored by Samsung)

Sergei, mid-30s, impeccable personal and professional criminal records, had consensual, prearranged sex with a 20-year-old woman. Lately, however, you are not an adult until you are 21. She swears in court that she believes he is innocent. However, the death penalty was recently introduced as part of a project to humanize the penal system for crimes where society has no real sense of wrongdoing. Consensual sex with minors is included. Rapists and murderers do not need to fear such punishment since they have already died a moral death.

However, the execution of the death penalty was humanized to the maximum. The prison is now called Combinat, you live like in a luxury hotel. So that no one becomes a murderer, executions are no longer carried out by executioners. Instead, a warden has recently taken you out for a walk every day through the same hallway, where one fine day you will be torn to pieces by a salvo of an automatic machine gun. This can happen in three days or in thirty years. As luck would have it. Even the guard has no idea. All humane, because you actually don't notice anything and can go on living your life as before. Sergei can also continue to practice his job as a university lecturer – online. Attempts to escape are not punished, because the law recognizes the desire for freedom as the highest human good, but Sergei's attempts to escape all end up back in the Combinat, where he soon longs to return – by remote control.

The absurdity of a life dependent on random algorithms is literally reflected in the absurdity of the dialogues with judges, law enforcement officials, ministers of various denominations or with Sergei's wife. To her he is a living corpse. He ruined her life, which is why she doesn't want to have anything to do with him anymore, as she makes him understand with increasing absurdity in his repeated calls from the Combinat. The absurdity of Sergei's own mental state is shown by the fact that after a short while he gives the machine gun a name and greets it every day on his walks with „Hello Sasha“. The absurdity of this little novel culminates in a surreal happy ending when Sergei disappears into the distance with his favorite prison officer on a last walk to the applause of all the protagonists mentioned in the book standing in a row, like during credits in the cinema. While Sasha, the machine gun, blasts the floor tiles to pieces in the deserted Combinat hallway.

The main character of the book, Sergei, is reminiscent of all the key figures of the most famous anti-utopias at once, from D-503 to Josef K., but the conditions in which he is placed have never been told in such a way. With the exception of the small fantastic basic premise, this dystopia moves right on the edge of the real. With his own style of writing, his laconic language working with repetitive structures, Danilov has already exposed our everyday routines in several novels in an ironic, philosophical and frighteningly beguiling way. But his style combined with this shocking plot made this new novel become a masterpiece.

Danilov was born in Moscow in 1969. Writer, playwright, poet. Author of eight books of prose, five books of poetry and six plays. „The Man from Podolsk“ was shown in more than 50 theatres worldwide. Danilov lives in Moscow.



THE AUTHOR

translations
6 languages

awards

Yasnaya Polyana Award 2022
Book of the Year 2022
Moscow Art Prize 2021
Golden Mask Award 2018
Premio Letterare Internazionale
Citta di Cattolica 2016
Novy Mir Award 2012

samples available
english

other work

Description of a City
Horizontal Position
The Man from Podolsk

Dmitri Danilov

literary fiction

"Dmitry Danilov's book seems to be about the future, but the world of ultimate comfort and utter bondage in which the novel's hero finds himself looks suspiciously familiar. This is a forecast for tomorrow that is already coming true today."

YURI SAPRYKIN

"You're alive, but you're dead. People are indifferent and selfish, but kind and unselfish. Nobody cares about you, but you are not alone. Each time we choose one of the two. And only Dmitry Danilov chooses both at once."

MARIA GALINA

"Excellent read by Dmitry Danilov. I heard it in early April 2022 while walking the streets of Moscow and when it came time to say goodbye to my beloved city."

LITRES (Anna about the audiobook)

"Everybody's forgiven Sergei but the state."

LIZA HAYDEN

Dmitri Danilov