

Russian narrative non-fiction

Man in Jail

Narrative non-fiction. Alpina Publishers. Moscow 2019. 269 pages

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The heroes of this documentary book are convicted Russian prisoners with varying degrees of ability to survive physically and morally under conditions of total deprivation of liberty, constant humiliation, hunger, slave labor and separation from relatives. All first and last names were changed. Yet these are true stories of people in camp confinement.

The author tells from his own experience about the years he spent as a prisoner, first in a remand prison and then in the Tagil penal camp for former law enforcement officers. The reader is immersed in a world of lawlessness in which prisoners want to survive and the guards try to squeeze as much as possible out of them.

The book is not a protest manifesto, but a factual report. Neutral in its basic tone, in the fates described sometimes bitter, sometimes funny, sometimes philosophical, but always honest and touching.

The accompanying text to the book written by Olga Romanova, TV and radio journalist and director of the NGO „Russia in Jail“, who emigrated to Germany after being threatened by the Russian authorities:

„Clever and not very honest and real criminals, rich and poor, prison authorities and servants - none of them can leave the camp. They are all forced to learn the hard and unwritten rules of another life. One can endure it, another cannot. Despite the lack of references to the Bible, these stories can be considered biblical. Instructive without preaching, exciting without a crime plot or melodrama, written in the very precise language of a person who has lived, experienced and understood all this himself.“



THE AUTHOR

other works

Sfumato

Agami - the sequel to Sfumato

Aleksei Fedyarov was born in Chuvashia in 1976. After studying law, he worked as an investigator for the public prosecutor's office for ten years. In 2007, he started his own business. In 2013, he was suddenly arrested and convicted of 'particularly serious fraud' – a fate shared with many Russian entrepreneurs. He served a three-year sentence in a camp in the Urals. While still in custody, Fedyarov began filing appeals on behalf of other prisoners. Today he is not only a human rights activist, he is now head of the legal department of the Rus Sidyashchi Charity Fund, the only fund that helps Russian prisoners and their families. At the same time, he is the managing partner of a law firm. Fedyarov lives in Moscow.

Aleksei Fedyarov

narrative non-fiction

Man in Jail

PRESS REVIEWS 1

"The book ... is less about prison than about Russia and the relationship between government and society."
RADIO LIBERTY

"As you read this book, it becomes very clear that we are in danger. It's very easy to be fooled. And our justice system will not disappoint us... It's an informative report on the inner workings of the prison system. And it seems somewhat well known. Which adds to the effect that our quiet, sated life is approaching an existence behind the barbed wire."
LIVELIB

"One reads in one breath, in one day, although sometimes a lump in the throat rises. Convoy, SIZO, SHIZO - these words rise in your memory, you push them away and tell yourself that it will certainly never happen to you, but then you remember the stories you read and understand that nothing in this life and in this country is certain. And when you get out of jail, that's it, you're a different person. Yes, someone may have been waiting for you, but you are still branded, society looks at you differently. This book is about the broken destinies of various men, supported by the warmth of their mothers and wives. It's not just about the harshness of the prison walls, but also about the management that exists in this system, if you can call it that, an algorithm of bullying and humiliation."
LIVELYB

"The book is not about ordinary convicts, but about former employees of the institutions. Who, like everyone else, are behind bars, without much advantage. Fedyarov writes in such a way that one feels both the fateful and the repulsive. Yes, a perpetrator must go to prison, nobody denies that. And if he is not a criminal? Or if he has committed a less serious crime, but was convicted according to a completely different paragraph? There are more than one such cases in the book."
LIVELIB

"The first book in a long time where I couldn't get away from reading. I cried and laughed. He writes simply and interestingly about what seems absurd, about what is sad and very scary. In some places it reminds me of Ilf and Petrov, in others it reminds me of Victor Frankl, Bulgakov and Stephen King in *The Shawshank Redemption*."
LITRES

"Many people in today's Russia are threatened with imprisonment in camps. Those who are being imprisoned. And those who imprison. And it will always be like this until something changes in our consciousness. Only then will there be justice, elected and responsible authorities, honest police... But for now, these are just wishful thinking."
LITRES

Aleksei Fedyarov

narrative non-fiction

Man in Jail

PRESS REVIEWS 2

"The book is incredibly valuable. In simple language, the author tells of the wonders and horrors of the Gulag in the 21st century. One unknowingly remembers the stories of Shalamov and thinks about how similar Fedyarov's stories are, and one involuntarily feels confusion and sadness: Why has almost nothing changed for so long, for so many dozens of years – neither in the organization of the prisons nor in human nature? Reading this book, I have experienced the whole range of emotions, and despite the incredible and sometimes very terrible events that the author carefully documents, one still has the feeling that justice – will come, that light at the end of the tunnel - will certainly appear, that the human soul – is the most important thing we have, and is so easily in danger of being lost."

BOOKVOED

LONG REVIEW by Mikhail Shevelev

"War, hospital and prison were and are one of the main sources of Russian literature. With regard to modern wars, the late Vladimir Makanin said more than anyone else, in my opinion, with the novel *Asan*. The hospital was described by Maxim Osipov in his notes *In the Homeland*. And the prison now came to us in the form of a book by Alexey Fedyarov: *Man in Jail*.

The author is a former public prosecutor from Cheboksary who left the public service and went into business and was then sentenced under the *Fraud Clause*, after which all our entrepreneurs have been imprisoned and will still be going to jail.

Man in Jail is a story about today's Russian camp, its inhabitants – prisoners and guards alike – and their relations with the free world.

The tradition of camp prose in Russian literature is rich – from Shalamov, Solzhenitsyn and Razgon to the current, youngest authors: Oleg Navalny, the notes of Mikhail Zakharin, who was sentenced to life imprisonment. In this tough competitive environment, Alexei Fedyarov's stories cut a very good figure. In many respects they even maintain the level of the honourable predecessors. In terms of love of life and the ability to find something cheerful about the most tragic circumstances, they are comparable to Dunskey and Frid's *Notes of a camp idiot*, and through the attention to detail and accuracy of language, they are comparable to Dovatov's *Zone*.

But there is one characteristic of *Man in Jail* that distinguishes it from the others – both historical and contemporary examples. His stories are not only and not so much about prison, which once again threatens each of us at every corner. It is about the ability not to bend, to survive and to win – not against prison, but against something further above – the state. The author is once again in freedom and not only got back on his feet, but also began to help others who found themselves in a similar situation. Meanwhile he is a successful lawyer and head of the legal department of the charity foundation *Russia in Jail*, one of the founders of the children's camp *Terra Nostra*, where children whose parents are innocently imprisoned are admitted free of charge..."

Aleksei Fedyarov