

mystical horror thriller

The Dog-headed

Mystical horror thriller. Mystical thriller. AST. Moscow 2011. 413 pages

Publishers: Italy - Voland

One remembers the extremely hot summer when the peat fields around Moscow were on fire. Even above a remote village near a former prison camp in the forest somewhere towards the Volga lies biting opaque smoke. Three Muscovites have been hired by an ominous preservation fund via the Internet to save a rare fresco depicting St. Christopher with a dog's head for the museum in the abandoned village church. Legend has it that Christophorus wanted to turn his brother into a man with a dog's head as a deterrent because he as a monk succumbed to the seduction of a girl. Instead, Christophorus himself was transformed into a dog-headed man, and in revenge he slashed his own brother and girl to pieces.

The village and its inhabitants, who are not only outwardly totally run-down, react aggressively to the strangers with their Mercedes bus, their notebooks and mobile phones including social networks. Liza is the only one who is friendly with the newcomers. But because of her speech impediment, her clues sound like warnings. While his two buddies are supposed to take care of the fresco's removal, Kirill makes closer contact with Liza. His mission is to investigate to what extent the customs and habits of the villagers still follow the legend of the dog-headed. Do old believers continue to do their mischief? Or do ex-GULAG convicts living in the forest avenge every attempt to leave the „zone“? Was it a dog-headed who raped Lisa just before she wanted to leave the village to study in Moscow?

For far too long, the three Muscovites have been thinking of everything as haunting images in the minds of the villagers, who are still socialized by the surveillance state Russia. But their enlightened intellectual view of the world breaks apart piece by piece in contact with this village community, which has degenerated from primitive primal fears to inhumanity. Did Kirill provoke everything because he got involved with Liza? The crossing of borderlines, no matter in which direction, the escape from one's own „zone“ becomes a danger to life for everyone. Even just a change of perspective can lead to ruin, and that's exactly how the author lures the reader in and has him on the hook like a fish.

Ivanov is at home in different genres. But he is always interested in those times, places and events in Russian culture where a transition from one cultural system to another takes place. Be it in Russian history, where new times replace the old ones, thematized in his historical and contemporary novels. Be it the collision of parallel systems, as in his mystical thrillers. His books are all explicitly plot driven, which is why almost all of them have become movies. Because they are easy to read and follow the rules of the genre, they are always aimed at a broad audience. But even on the surface one senses, without having to consciously perceive it, the authentic saturation and great closeness to life of his novels. Because only one layer deeper Ivanov's books are full of documentary facts, socio-historical descriptions and witty references. This way, even more intellectual reader will get their money's worth and on top of that a good deal of horror, suspense or historical-exotic entertainment.



THE AUTHOR

languages

8 languages

awards

2006 Yasnaya Polyana Award
 2006 Big Book Award
 2006 Strannik Prize
 2004 Book of the Year
 2004 Bazhov Award
 2003 Mamin-Sibiriyak Award

sample translation available

english

Aleksei Ivanov

mystical horror thriller

"A rich, atmospheric American thriller, moved to our native aspen forest, which uses all our Russian phobias... of course the reader is hoodwinked, but extremely clever."
ST. PETERBURG VEDOMOSTI

"A clever, never boring, atmospheric novel, written in good literary language... exciting not as a „mystical thriller“, but as a novel about the violent conflict between parallel social worlds."
AFISHA

"The foundation of the novel is not the series of supernatural events, but the conflict between two worlds within one state. The author succeeds in illustrating in a very unusual way how Moscow differs from the rest of Russia."
Journal FOR ALL MEN

"An exciting, well-thought-out and intelligently constructed book that challenges the reader to solve puzzles that are extremely interesting, and provides imaginative worlds worth thinking about."
KOMMERSANT

Aleksei Ivanov was born in 1969 in Gorky (today Nizhny Novgorod). He grew up in Perm in the Urals. In 1996 he graduated from the University of Ekaterinburg with a degree in art history. He then worked as a caretaker, laboratory assistant, tourist guide, teacher, journalist and lecturer. His first publication in a magazine in 1990 was a fantasy novel. His first book publication was the mystical-historical novel „Heart of Parma“ 2003. 11 novels and 7 non-fiction books by him are now available with a total circulation of over 1.5 million. 5 books have been filmed, 5 more are currently being filmed. Aleksei Ivanov lives in Perm.

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