

historical novel

Heart of Parma

Historical novel. AST. Moscow 2003. 668 pages

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Heart of the Taiga is epic, romantic, lush, brutal and wrenchingly mystical: history blends seamlessly with invention, new religion with native magic, passion with death. It is a heady, superbly involving entertainment with battles and churches, captives and crucifixions, pagan temples and human sacrifice, princes and traitors, women who turn into wolves and men who are cursed to live forever. It is, at heart, the tale of conquest and clashing civilizations – the story of a Russian prince and a pagan chieftain, each unable to retreat from his nemesis, both crushed on the wheel of history, both destined to seek an impossible victory over one another and find it in tragedy and betrayal at the cost of their soul.

The book is set in the 15th century: Ivan the Terrible has just ascended the throne and the brutal push into Perm and Siberia, out from the Ural mountains begins in earnest. Moscow is centralizing power, though Novgorod and Kazan fight for their autonomy and the Tatars are still paid tribute. Meanwhile, in the deep forests ringing the Urals, the pagan ruler of Perm, Assyka, gathers a horde for a decisive push against the Russian invaders. The plot is anchored by four battles. The first, a raid on the fortress of a minor prince of Rus sent out from Moscow to carve a taiga stronghold, leaves his young sons Michael and Vassily homeless orphans. The second sees Prince Michael, grown to manhood and married to a native princess, smash Assyka's own stronghold, avenge his father and take up the mantle of rule. A decade later, the fragile peace Michael is building with native clans is smashed by fresh demands from Moscow; Michael takes arms against Ivan the Terrible's army to stand with his neighbors, the combined force is annihilated and the prince is taken captive to Moscow to face the wrath of the Tsar. The final battle pits Assyka and Michael against one another once more, but it is the betrayal of their sons, who conspire together, that destroys the two men and sets the course of history. Through it all, the taiga looms above and around the small Russian outposts as they huddle by the great cold rivers, fearful of the vast, teeming wilderness and the people and spirits who call it home, yet driven relentlessly to subjugate it.

It was compared to Lord of the Rings and Beowulf; but one could rather say Shogun and Clan of the Cave Bear.

"An inimitable master of historical storytelling. His visionary way of writing about the past gives the reader the sense of being a participant in or witness of large-scale historical events, yet at the same time feeling very close to the novel's protagonists. He unfolds a colourful, realistic large tableau of an epoch while managing to also portray deeply intimate, private moments in the lives of his characters. Frankly, I don't know how he does it. He is a writer of enormous, magical talent." ELENA LAPPIN

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.



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-Sibiryak Award

sample translation available

english

Aleksei Ivanov