

historical novel

Shades of the Teutons

Historical mystical blockbuster. Ripol Classic. Moscow 2021. 384 pages with geographical maps

Award: Audiobook of the Year 2021

The main action of the novel takes place in May 1945, immediately after the end of the war between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. The setting is the town of Pillau in East Prussia (now Baltijsk). But through the events of May 1945, events of the 15th century at Marienburg Castle shine through and mystically influence the events in Pillau. Two epochs, two historical catastrophes – the decline of the Teutonic Order and the collapse of National Socialism – seem to mirror each other in a strange way.

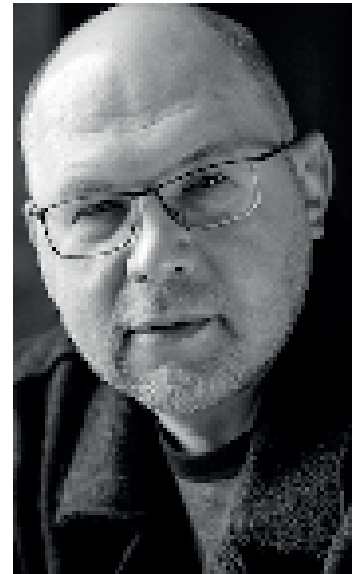
„The ponderous historical novel of the twentieth century now seems archaic. It no longer corresponds to the language of our time.... Fantasy or mysticism, paradoxically, are not at all at odds with historicity. What is the essence of the historical novel? It is not about decorative scenery. It's about the protagonists being motivated by a historical process.... I need mysticism to reveal important ideas. My hero talks to the devil. And the devil explains that God is the creator of everything and that he, the devil, cannot create anything, he can only imitate, repeat, copy. And conspiracy theories and by extension postmodernism mean - copy.“
(Aleksi Ivanov in an interview about his novel)

“The authors who know how to write exciting and unconventional books for the general public can be counted on one hand. And of these few, Aleksi Ivanov can confidently count on a yellow jersey...”

The commercial „blockbuster“ character of „Shades of the Teutons“ by no means automatically means that it lacks really strong elements and artistic depth. The majestic battle scenes in Ivanov's text are built with a truly Tolkienian epic sweep and as such are unprecedented in post-Soviet Russian literature...

The novel works magnificently: it engages the reader, entertains, abducts, and puts our external everyday world on pause. ... Now we have, if not our own Stephen King, at least our own Robert Harris.”

GALINA YUZEFOVICH in MEDUZA



THE AUTHOR

languages

8 languages

awards

2021 audiobook of the Year
2006 Yasnaya Polyana Award
2006 Big Book Award
2006 Strannik Prize
2004 Book of the Year
2004 Bazhov Award
2003 Mamin-Sibiriyak Award

Aleksi 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. Aleksi Ivanov lives in Perm.

Aleksi Ivanov

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Synopsis

In the middle of the 15th century there is a war between the trading towns of Baltic Pomerania and the Teutonic Order. In order to be able to conquer Marienburg, the capital of the Order, the Pole Kajetan makes a deal with Satan: Marienburg will fall if Kajetan captures the sword Liguet for Satan. This sword was used to behead John the Baptist, and the knights of the Teutonic Order had captured it during the Crusades. But the plan goes wrong, Kajetan's clan is cursed to have only one male descendant in each generation until one of them obtains the sword.

Five hundred years later: the Polish historian Vincent, a descendant of Kajetan, is studying the history of the Teutonic Order. When the war with Germany begins, two of Vincent's brothers are killed. One is killed by the Germans in battle, the other is shot by the Russians at Katyn. Kozłowski, historian and former prime minister of Poland, tells Vincent about the curse in order to get the sword himself with his help. Vincent agrees, fearing for his own sons. But Kozłowski is a collaborator working for the Gauleiter Erich Koch. Koch wants permission from Hitler to territorially restore the Teutonic Order as a pseudo-state. He wants to become independent and rich himself through this. The mystically inclined Hitler first demands proof of Koch's suitability as „master of the new Teutons.“ Kozłowski proposes to Koch the acquisition of the sword as proof. In the meantime, this sword seems to be in the inventory of the local history museum of the city of Pillau.

In his search for the sword, Vincent joins forces with the Soviet counterintelligence, who are looking for Koch. The latter is said to be hiding in a secret underground facility in Pillau, from where he plans to escape in a mini-submarine – complete with sword procured for him by a pilot of the Nazi partisan organization Werwolf. Gradually grasping what is happening, Vincent discovers a similarity between the events of the mid-15th century and May 1945, and plans the operation in the Pillau catacombs accordingly. But he makes mistakes in the symbolic „mirroring“ of the people involved: he does not take into account the human feelings and relationships between the characters, and therefore falls for Kozłowski and gets everything mixed up. Just like Kajetan, Vincent also fails in his search for the sword.

The novel aims at the fact that repetition of history always remains a devil's way as long as one sees in people only functional figures and not living sentient beings. The reader is left with the option of reading the whole machinations of the devil as an ancient legend, and to interpret the whole story with the enchanted sword without further ado as a Bulgakovian metaphor of an alternative – and not at all necessarily malicious – form of regulation of geopolitical processes.

Gauleiter Erich Koch, Professor Kozłowski and many other characters in the novel (Polish historian Jan Długosz, German historian Konrad Haberland, Taborite leader Ulrich Chervonka, Pillau commander Pierre de la Kav, Lithuanian historian Povilas Pakarklis, German master Luduzen von Ehrlichshall) are real historical actors. The places of action – Königsberg (Kaliningrad), Pillau (Baltijsk), Danzig (Gdansk), Marienburg (Malbork) and the concentration camp Stutthof – are also real. The events of the novel are entirely consistent with the documented history. The „military“ elements are realistic, the „Teutonic“ elements are indeed gothic mystic.

Aleksei Ivanov