

Russian literary fiction

# Moscow Banksy

(Middle Edda)

**Political thriller.** AST Publishers. Moscow 2019. 347 pages

Suddenly, new graffiti appears in Moscow week after week with a clock-face in the corner, the painted hand creeping towards 12. The grotesque works of an anonymous graffiti artist each represent a different member of the new bureaucratic nomenklatura - each of whom dies shortly afterwards. While the graffiti artist quickly becomes a new icon for the liberal protest movement, spin doctors close to the Kremlin are frantically trying to reveal his identity.

But the power elites are divided. Some arrest well-known opposition street artists and hire teams of 'censors' who immediately paint over any new graffiti to prevent the image being distributed via social networks. When images of the cleaned-up graffiti are posted all over Moscow, other power clans interpret this as an attack from their competitors and start a violent search for the ringleader among the city administration, oil companies and oligarchs.

Meanwhile, some representatives of the corrupt power hierarchy are ready to pay huge sums for the next graffiti to depict one of their opponents. A large opposition rally in the center of Moscow turns out to be staged by people with a great deal at stake in the struggle for future power. When the demo turns into a bloody battle it serves as a welcome distraction from their political intrigue: the dismissal of the government, the flight of the speaker of parliament abroad and the long-prepared installation of a puppet candidate as deputy spokesman and formally number two in the state hierarchy. And number one, if anything happens to the president.

Everyone in Moscow is convinced that the twelfth graffiti will show the president. The city is paralysed when the presidential limousine's escort stops unscheduled in the center of Moscow. Despite the utmost security precautions, it is clear to everyone - it's the president next.

"It is not us that are like that, it's life and the novel too. The book of a generation, the death knell of a decade, and quite simply a novel of its time- bitter, angry and at the same time full of hope."

SHAMIL IDIATULLIN

"Exactly the novel about here and now that we have been missing for so long. Chamber play and global epos at the same time; an emotional story about living people, an exciting thriller, a razor-sharp, socially critical drama."

GALINA YUZEFOVICH

"A political crime thriller, an anti-utopia, a Russian Dogville, a saga about the battle of the Norse gods ... But above all a searching and relentless diagnosis of the generation of the Russian 2000s, painful and timely."

ALEKSANDR GAVRILOV

Dmitri Zakharov was born in 1979 in a 'closed' city in Siberia near Krasnoyarsk. After training as a journalist, he worked as a correspondent and editor for Kommersant newspaper and headed various marketing departments in the government and the private sectors. Dmitri Zakharov lives in St. Petersburg



## THE AUTHOR

sample translation

english

# Dmitri Zakharov

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## ADDITIONAL REVIEWS

"The book is definitely fantastical, but underneath all the layers of the author's imagination lies the unfailingly recognizable daily life of Russia. The bloody battle on Tverskaya and the predetermined 'public hearings' are portrayed with both detachment and a high degree of drama, like battle scenes in the movies. The contemporary slang scattered across the pages and the mentions of real people bring about a terrible realisation – that here – slightly blurred – is our reality."

THE VILLAGE

"The author was said to have described the Moscow protests from last summer particularly well – and yet the novel was finished six months before these events. Bizarrely, the book even reflects the story of the shaman walking to Moscow, although nothing was known about the shaman when the author was working on the text ... Middle Edda calls to mind the best early novels by Victor Pelevin - Generation P, Chapaev, and Void – this is a book in which we recognize a cynical image of ourselves."

POLIT.RU

"The behind-the-scenes plotting generates fury. But the novel also shows something of value in our times. Love, the pursuit of justice – the very thing that tends to slip away behind the blinkers of political media hype."

PSYCHOLOGIES

"It couldn't be more of the moment! A masterful cocktail of intrigues of power, opposition struggles, mysticism and more than appropriate swearing and slang. A mass of hidden motives, manipulati-on, provocation, and kickbacks."

LIVELIB

"Middle Edda has just one purpose: to portray the present. Whether blindly feeling his way, applying genuine skill or simply getting straight to the point, Zakharov assumes the stark responsibility of leading contemporary Russian literature into the field of political pronouncements – at the very least this is not only a seductive, but also an encouraging endeavor."

PROCHTENIE

"The author manages to tell a lively and consistent story, to convey both subtle psychology and battle scenes. And this has a very unexpected effect: the further you move away from the novel, the more interesting and clear its contours become. In that sense, Middle Edda is an impressionist novel. This effect is also achieved by the fact that the readers have a lot to do for themselves. The author does not lead them by the hand, but presents what initially appear to be unrelated pictures and scenes from life, and then the reader must finish the job, must think and join the dots, in order to complete the text in his head. But the thin line between meaningless clutter and deliberate device is not crossed."

DENIS EPIFANTSEV

# Dmitri Zakharov