



## About the author:

**SERGEY KUZNETSOV** is a contemporary Russian writer, journalist, entrepreneur and educator. Kuznetsov took part in forming post-Soviet independent journalism in Russia, focusing mainly on movies and literature, and in 2011 became the only Russian journalist having received a Knight Fellowship in journalism from Stanford University. Sergey contributes to American periodicals, including *The New York Times*, *The Huffington Post* and others.

Kuznetsov is the author of a dozen of books of prose, including *The Butterfly Skin*, a thriller published in 12 languages, including English, German and French, and *Round Dance of Water*, published by Dalkey Archive in the English language in the end of 2022. Kuznetsov received numerous nominations to the prestigious literary prizes and was a finalist for the Big Book Award and New Horizons Award, for the best novel in sci-fi and fantasy.

In 2018 Sergei Kuznetsov, together with his wife Ekaterina Kadieva, launched the international middle school Le Sallay Academy, with branches in France and the States. Since 2013 Kuznetsov resides with his family in France.

## Selected Bibliography

2023 — **Meat Grinder**, *novel*

2019 — **The Teacher Dymov**, *novel*

2019 — **Living and All Grown Up**, *trilogy, novels*

2016 — **Kaleidoscope: Expendable Materials**, *novel*

2010 — **The Round Dance of Water**, *novel*

2005 — **Butterfly Skin**, *novel*

2004 — **PG21** (in co-authorship with Linor Goralik) *novel*

2004 — **The Nineties: A Fairy-Tale**, *trilogy, novel*

**The Knight Fellowship** from Stanford University 2001

Finalist of the **Big Book Award 2011**

**Man of the Year 5771** by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia 2011

Longlisted for the **Big Bok Award 2016, 2018**

Shortlisted for the **New Literature Award 2018**

Longlisted for **Yasnaya Polyana Award 2018, 2019**

Shortlisted for the **New Horizons Prize 2017, 2019**

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## Meat Grinder

What if guilt turned into a deadly virus springing up a pandemic of suicides and suicide killings across continents? Razor-sharp and bold as Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, raw and disturbing as Marlon James' *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, *Meat Grinder* takes you on a roller-coaster ride across years, continents and fates. Sergey Kuznetsov brilliantly dissects the ideas of personal vs collective guilt, memory vs history, and considers violence from the perspectives of culture, society, sex and, ultimately, human nature.

**Manuscript**  
 Novel, 2023  
 196,143 words

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*Meat Grinder* was nearly completed by the time the war in Ukraine began in February 2022. Conceived as a reflection on the pandemic, the narrative themes shifted from violence to guilt, and to PTSD. The war made these topics even more relevant, although the book is set in an alternate future where this war never happened.

2030. While studying the statistics of expanded suicides and self-destruction, big data analyst Kevin Mead notices that the spread dynamics of these incidents resemble the progression of a pandemic. However, he never manages to fully understand the nature of the disease that would later be named after him, as he falls victim to the virus, committing a horrendous suicide.

Among the novel's versatile cast there are Thierry and Sonia, a young couple spending their second honeymoon on *Pleasure Island*, a hidden tropical paradise; a gorgeous Michelle, an owner of a marketing agency in Paris, who had a bitter-sweet love affair with Thierry in the past, her teenage son Quentin, as well as her non-binary lover Vic; Sonia's parents, Russian-Jewish immigrants who have made a successful business in the US; Mirabel, a flight attendant suffering from alcoholism and nymphomania; Charlie Kumamoto, a Japanese-American marine stationed on the other side of *Pleasure Island*; participants and victims of the war in Yugoslavia who are futilely trying to forget their past and heal the wounds that have already been passed down to their children. All of them, in one way or another, will encounter Mead's disease as the epidemic swiftly spreads across the world.

Its first stage resembles the flu, the second — a transcendental trip, and in the third, an immense guilt emerges inside the afflicted individual, growing to a point where it becomes unbearable. This guilt could be towards parents, children, spouses and lovers, the underprivileged, the ravaged nature,

the victims of wars and outbreaks of violence. The feeling of unbearable guilt pushes the afflicted person to the edge, where suicide seems like the only way out.

However, not everyone succumbs to the disease. Some possess innate immunity for some, the disease takes a mild form, and others are saved by the arrival of a vaccine. But how safe is the vaccine itself? By safeguarding people from the sense of guilt, wouldn't the vaccine kill conscience itself?

The questions are many, and now, groups of religious extremists storm the medical lab building...

Despite its substantial volume the novel doesn't fit the mold of what is typically referred to as a "big Russian novel." This is a rare case when a Russian novel has little to do with anything Russian. The author is not interested in Russia, its history, or its problems. Among the cast of some thirty characters, only two have Russian roots, having long left their heritage behind. According to the author, Sergey Kuznetsov drew inspiration from books like *A Brief History of Seven Killings* by Marlon James, *Blood Meridian* by Cormac McCarthy, *2666* by Roberto Bolaño, and above all, *Infinite Jest*. The common denominator is the authors' intent to confront the reader with the unbearable: with depression, pain, suffering, and violence. *Meat Grinder* adds guilt and the torment of conscience to the mix.

In *Meat Grinder*, Sergey Kuznetsov stays true to his signature writing approach: the novel is a gaudy yet finely interlaced patchwork of life stories. Each individual voice is surgically pitched and masterly directed into a powerful symphony on modern-time ambiguities and fears. This is a brutal, frightening, and relentless book, but through the darkness a faint glimmer of hope still flickers.

Longlisted for the **National Bestseller Prize 2011**Nominated for the **New Literature Award 2011**Finalist of the **Big Book Award 2011**

AST  
2010  
Elena Shubina Publishing (AST)  
Novel, 2019  
608 pp

*Translation rights sold*  
World English Dalkey Archive Press  
Arabic AS Publishers

Complete  
English translation  
available

## The Round Dance of Water

From the man Arturo Pérez-Reverte has called “the most talented young Russian author” comes this extraordinary family saga, a journey into the depths of the human soul.

The *Round Dance of Water* is an intricately patterned portrait of three generations of a large family. In the narrative there is no division into primary and secondary characters: each individual fate bears significant weight and streams into the common flow of the turbulent history of the 20th century.

There's Nikita Melnikov, 37, who runs a small aquarian design business. As he soaks in his young lover's sweat, Maria, Nikita's wife, is verging on despair, crushed by her fruitless attempts to conceive a child. She sees her barren body as a vessel for other people's dramas, living through the grieves and sorrows of strangers and opening herself up to the tragedies of people she could never meet in the real world. They come to her in dreams, these strangers, and Maria, an unwilling witness, never imagines that the history of her own family could in fact be intertwined with these sad stories.

Alexander Brisov, Nikita's 30-year old step-brother, is a gifted artist whose once anti-bourgeois escapist actions have now turned into frequent drinking bouts. In his bleak, vodka-infused fears, he is being dragged to the bottom by monsters and drowned men. He suspects that he knows who these ghosts are — they are the victims of the purges, arrested and interrogated in the 1930s by his grandfather Grigory Brisov, a member of the Russian nobility who became an NKVD officer to save his own and his family's lives.

We also follow the life of Nikita's and Alexander's cousin. Anya, 33, is a single mother who works as a salesclerk in a shoe shop. A strong and independent young woman, she takes after her grandmother,

who served as a sniper in WWII. Shielding herself from attachments with the motto *Be afraid of no one, rely on no one* — and trouble can't touch you, Anya is caught unprepared when her new lover offers to build a normal life together with her. Time here is like deep water separating people from different epochs; yet it is also numerous streams that flow from the past into modern days. Actions taken by the characters' parents in the past echo decisions their children make in the present — strange parallels seen through the looking glass of the refracted surface of time.

As the finely pitched narrative moves between generations, locales, and times, so shifts the tone of the text. Each character's story is told in part by themselves and as imagined by another member of the family, making for unexpected twists and discoveries. The journey into time and human psychology has also become a field for literary adventure for Sergey Kuznetsov. Written in a clear, elegant style, the novel is filled with literary allusions and is rich with cultural codes. The range of voices is diverse and broad — from Rudyard Kipling through Andrei Platonov and Daniil Kharms, Alexander Solzhenitsyn and the Strugatsky brothers; from canonic film noir to Japanese anime. The masterfully directed chorus is an outstanding accomplishment, a pure artistic delight, and the novel represents a genuine exploration of culture of the 20th century.

### Selected quotes

A whirlpool that drags a swimmer to the bottom, into death and oblivion, it is also a waterspout lifting one above the surface of life. Finally, it's the eternal cycle we know about from our schooldays. Sergey Kuznetsov's novel is a battle with the fear of death.

The recipe is simple: love those who are close to you, and remember that you are neither the beginning, nor the end. Yes, this unusual family saga also resembles a whirlpool, engulfing its readers and holding them till the last page.

An unusual chronicle of our time, of the past decades. It's not only the story of various characters, not only a portrait gallery. This is a history of human passions, a “rounddance” of desire told in 108 chapters (an essential number in Buddhist culture).

*Echo of Moscow Radio*

Leonid Yuzefovich  
writer

Longlisted for Yasnaya Polyana Award 2019

Shortlisted for the New Horizons Award 2019



**Livebook**  
Novel, 2019  
340 pp

Complete  
English translation  
available

## Living and All Grown Up

Stranger Things in a Cold War times setting.

Living and All Grown Up is set in an alternative world where there is a border separating the living from the dead. There has been a war between the two; however, some forms of communication and cooperation exist. The general feeling is that a bad peace is better than a good war. However, the main characters struggle to find their standing and place their loyalties. Their choice is either to go with state propaganda or investigate the shadow areas and history of the conflict, to change the world and find a possibility for coexisting. Nicka, Marina, Leva, and Gosha are 13 years old, they live in a strictly ordered society of the living in the aftermath of the bloody war with the dead which split the known world in two. They are taught that the dead are the enemy, every contact is forbidden and labeled treason. However, technologies, consumer goods, gossip, and movies trickle into the world of the living, and are of great value and interest. What's across the Border? Should the teenagers trust the adults that all the dead are evil? Or is there more to this black and white order of things?

When the friends stumble upon an opportunity to communicate with a teenage dead how can they resist? They become friends with Mike who showers them with knowledge of the world of the dead. New gadgets, languages and jargon, new interpretation of the known historical events and social order — Nicka, Marina, Leva, and Gosha are sponging the information. How come their deadly enemy is just like them? He even falls in love with Marina although this is strictly forbidden — there is no time in the world of the dead and Mike will never age.

This seemingly innocent exchange and blossoming friendships turn out to be a trap. The group of friends incidentally help to breach the border and come under attack of zombies and other evil creatures. Their interaction has been flawed all along — scheming adults have been trying to use it to gain control of both worlds. Will they be able to restore the balance?

The reader can easily see through the allusions of the two depicted world — one is controlled, grim and propaganda-driven, the other seductive in its abundance but seemingly soulless and submerged in consumerism. Meaningless consumption and money as the only true value vs ascetic idealism and propaganda. The conflict is recognizable as of the two conflicting ideologies.

This is an adventure and action-packed novel about growing up and making one's mind, making tricky decisions and taking responsibility. Each of the teenagers becomes a hero in their own way, not just by fighting zombies but also making everyday choices that will define their future selves. With likable characters and recognizable conflicts, the novel can be read as a tense YA horror and espionage thriller or a musing on the everlasting issues of death, loyalty and freedom of will.

### Selected quotes

This is a story of real friendship, about coming of age, about first love, ethical choices and cynicism, of frankness and betrayal. It also tells that when you are an adult many things look different from what they appeared at the first sight. And it also tells that you should never despair and drop hopes to change the world.

*Vasiliy Vladimirovsky*  
*Mir Fantastiki*

Two worlds, introduced by the author, still surround us these days.

*Vladimir Larionov*  
*a critic*