



About the author:

VERA BOGDANOVA (1986) was born in Moscow. She graduated from Moscow Region State University as a professional translator from the English language and attended language school in New York. In 2019 she completed a two-year creative writing course run by Olga Slavnikova. Bogdanova's short stories were published in anthologies, literary journals and platforms. She is also the author of sci-fi novels published under the literary pen-name Vera Ogneva, which received nominations for literary awards (New Horizons and Interpresscon in 2017). Her first novel, published under her real name, *Pavel Zhang and Other River Beasts*, was a finalist of the Litsei Literature Award for Young Writers, entered a short list for the National Bestseller Prize, and was in the run for the Big Book Award, Yasnaya Polyana Award and New Literature Prize (NOS). Bogdanova runs a blog on translated fiction from the States and the United Kingdom, @wordsnletters. Her novel *The Season of Poisoned Fruits* received a warm welcome from critics and struck a chord with readers, coming out in the second printing within two months since publication.

Selected Bibliography

2022 — **The Season of Poisoned Fruits**, *novel*

2021 — **Pavel Zhang and Other River Beasts**, *novel*

Nominated for the **Big Book Award 2022**

Nominated for the **New Literature Award 2022**

Nominated for **Yasnaya Polyana Prize 2022**

Shortlisted for the **National Bestseller Prize 2021**

Nominated for the **Big Book Award 2021**

Finalist of the **Litsei Literature Award for Young Writers 2020**

Nominated for **New Horizons 2017**

Nominated for the **Big Book Award 2022**

Nominated for the **New Literature Award 2022**

Nominated for **Yasnaya Polyana Prize 2022**



Elena Shubina Publishing (AST)

Novel, 2022

348 pp

Translation rights sold

French Actes Sud

Film rights

Under option

The Season of Poisoned Fruits

With this melancholic and sad love story Vera Bogdanova throws limelight to the hidden psychological traumas torturing people in their forties in modern Russia, and smartly investigates the social (and political) turmoil that forms the core of the generation, growing up in the 1990s.

The message is bitter: we are poisoned fruits, the fruits of delusions, obsessions and uncertainty of our time.

Since early childhood, Zhenya was told that she should be a good girl: get higher education, build a career, get married and have children, all this before she's thirty. And yet there she is — hitting thirty, no longer able to have children or known to set healthy boundaries, secretly struggling with alcohol addiction, hiding away literally at the end of the world, and still pining for the only person she ever loved, a man she has known since childhood — her cousin Ilya. They have been irresistibly drawn to each other since sixteen, and Zhenya sees this forbidden and devastating love affair as her only comfort, and her curse. Not only has it brought doom on her own head, but on anyone she's ever known, or so she feels.

Ilya, in the meantime, is just as desperate to be “a real man”: to earn more, provide for his family, never have to beg, show weakness, or witness the abuse his mother suffered from the violent thug of a stepfather. Ilya, too, hides a dark secret, bearing the guilt for his stepfather's apparently accidental death. But none of his efforts to conform to the “social norm” pays off or brings relief — his life is stuck in a rut and he himself in an unhappy marriage, unable to break the vicious work-sleep-mortgage circle.

His half-sister Dasha, on the other hand, unable to embrace her own sexuality (and her unrequited teenage attraction to Zhenya), still sees her abusive father as a role model, and time after time falls for the same wife-basher type. One of them becomes her husband, and this union threatens Dasha's life.

Each of them faces their own demons, failing to see how their choices end up ruining the lives of others — and their own.

Set against the dramatic backdrop of early to mid 2000s, with its terrorist attacks, Beslan school siege, London bombings and general chaos, their stories echo with the historical turmoil in a desperate search of a new identity.

The Season of Poisoned Fruits is the story of a generation that grew up in the 90s, children of parents who survived in the chaos having plunged the country. Today these children have grown up and they seek security and stability they were deprived of, also desperately searching for their own selves. Yet would they find a “new beautiful world” or the poison from the fruits of the past won't let them see the way?

Selected quotes

With her novel Bogdanova makes a diagnosis of the whole generation with clarity, bitterness and compassion, like no other modern Russian writer.

meduza.io

This is like Nabokov's Ada — the pain and gloom of the 90ies and the early aughts: a granny's country house, a family saga, strange backyards, the family blood. Today this all is neither wildly exotic nor noirish — we have survived, have grown up and so we can speak about what it is like to be a strange girl in a strange time. Vera Bogdanova unwinds traumas and fates of her characters carefully and gently, like blood-soaked bandage. Bogdanova is not trying to make her characters suffer to amuse some hypothetical reader.

On the contrary, she seeks ways to save them all.

She succeeds, eventually, even with those who cannot be saved.

Tatsiana Zamirovskaya
the author of *The Deadnet*

The first thing you want to do when you finish the novel is name it the book of the generation. The 90s, the aughts, economic downfall and con-

sumerism, Soviet and post-Soviet patriarchal norms, domestic violence, terroristic attacks on the news, upsurging nationalistic movements at the backdrop, a suppressed sexuality and liberation from inhibitions and social restrains — all these contexts intertwine in a smartly contrived plot.

Rules of Life (former Esquire)

In *The Season of Poisoned Fruits* the violence is a norm, while happiness is doomed. There're no positive characters in the novel, yet quite a lot of typical ones, easy to recognize: these are words we heard from the family, these are traumas we wished to share... A common love story turns into a smartly contrived, complex psychological drama about feelings and historical memory.

Afisha Daily

With her novel, Vera Bogdanova gives a chance to speak up and fight back to those women who have long been used to keep quiet and endure.

Yunost magazine

Shortlisted for the **National Bestseller Award 2021**

Nominated for the **New Literature Award NOS 2021**

Longlisted for the **Big Book Award, Yasnaya Polyana 2021**

Finalist of the **Litsei Literature Award for Young Writers 2020**



Elena Shubina Publishing (AST)

Novel, 2021

443 pp

Pavel Zhang and Other River Beasts

If Jude from *A Little Life* were mixed-race and lived in a near-future, high-tech surveillance state controlled by China, he would be Pavel Zhang, the protagonist of Vera Bogdanova's provoking and profoundly moving dystopian debut novel.

2049, Moscow. After a decade of sanctions and economic crises, Russia becomes part of the Asian Union, headed by Beijing. Everything related to China is considered prestigious, while Russia is just a territory of natural resources and manpower. The Asian Union is a high-tech surveillance state, and every citizen in China is implanted with a chip that controls health, finance and every aspects of daily routines. In opposition to the massive mandatory introduction of chips there acts a radical activist group, CounterNet. Software for the chips is developed by the Russian branch of a Chinese IT corporation, where the protagonist of the novel, Pavel Zhang, is a young specialist with a promising future.

Two things poison Pavel Zhang's life in the spring of 2049. First, his dream job — as a curator for the chip software development project — goes to his competitor. This job was more than just a step up on Pavel's career ladder: it now feels as if Beijing itself is falling out of reach. Moreover, when he's volunteering at an orphanage near Moscow, Pavel runs across Krasnov — a man who raped him in childhood.

Pavel was first raped when he was 13 and lived in an orphanage. The sexual abuse, condoned by the orphanage authorities, was regular, and Pavel happened to be the only child to fight back: he collected evidence and sent it to both the police and bloggers. Pavel discovers that Krasnov escaped punishment thanks to family connections and that he still has access to children.

Knowing that Krasnov won't repent or stop abusing children, Pavel confronts and murders Krasnov by drowning him in a pond.

Against odds, Pavel succeeds in his long-awaited promotion to the Chinese head office. In Beijing, however, the Chinese do not regard Pavel as one of them,

and China doesn't quite match up to his dreams. Disillusioned, Pavel approaches the CounterNet. He hacks the Diyu data to reveal a shocking truth about the authorities' true intentions. The state will not only control life of its citizens but also choose to end it if they wish. Pavel's father, a leader of the CounterNet organization, was the first subject of this experiment: he died after chip implementation, after many years in prison. His death in the file shows up as a death from natural causes, but now Pavel knows better.

He seeks revenge for his ruined childhood, the abuse he suffered in the orphanage, for the family he failed, and his defeated dreams. He will fight for the freedom and the choice of every person — something he did not have — and nothing will stop him in his final act, not even death.

Vera Bogdanova has written a masterly crafted text that challenges its readers with acute social issues (sexual abuse, childhood trauma and its violent consequences, the government's digital control, Internet addiction, and objectification of woman) and at the same time compels the reader to sympathize with the dramas, twists, and challenges in the characters' lives. This rich, frank, and emotional text is at once deft and spacious, filled with air, sounds of lively, brisk, true-to-life dialogues, the novel's transient fine colors, shifting landscapes, vivid realistic details... all set against the backdrop of the flow of an ever-changing river. The result is a spectacular debut that defies genres and expectations and is written in a clear voice that makes Bogdanova a woman to watch in contemporary Russian fiction.





Pavel Zhang and Other River Beasts

Selected quotes

Vera Bogdanova is overwhelmed with fears and concerns, and she is both compassionate and resentful to a degree that the reader has no chance to remain distant and reserved about the story she tells. Pavel Zhang truly amazes with its natural emotional force and with the beauty and charm of its carefully crafted structure.

meduza.io

This is a debut novel that feels like some sort of minor literary miracle.

Lizok's Bookshelf

The story of Pavel Zhang is a story of the long-term impact and consequences of trauma that takes root and flourishes inside, never easing its grip as it continues to attract new problems, new violence, and endless new evils.

literaturno.com

For Bogdanova, dystopia is a setting for heated dispute about a traumatic experience, whether we inflict the trauma, or a traumatic experience transforms us, all as mythological monsters inhabit our hearts.

Esquire

Pavel Zhang is rightfully a central figure of the novel — he is a hero of our time, torn between feelings and career, abused yet unbroken and uncomplaining. He has pulled himself from the bottom of the river by his own hair and does not want to go back, especially since he still feels the taste of sludge in his mouth.

dtf.ru

Vera Bogdanova has touched numerous sore spots that aren't pleasant to discuss but need to be discussed. Violence against the individual, social violence, unfounded hatred, the defeated dreams of a young generation. Despite its dystopian nature and its dark, grim reality, the novel is not devoid of hope. There's hope, yet one has to be persistent in their search, fighting against the river beasts of sorts, and the most vile of all — the human being.

prochtenie.org

