

Mead's Grinder by Sergei Kuznetsov

Synopsis/author's statement

The novel "Moss's Meat Grinder" was nearly completed by the time the war in Ukraine began in February 2022. Conceived as a reflection on the pandemic, the book unexpectedly turned into a novel about violence, guilt, and PTSD. The war made these themes 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 Moss notices that the spread dynamics of these incidents resemble the progression of a pandemic. However, he never manages to understand the nature of the disease that would later be named after him – and neither does the reader understand at first, until the truth is revealed.

Among the characters in the novel are Thierry and Sonia, a young couple spending their second honeymoon on Pleasure Island, a hidden tropical paradise; Michelle, Thierry's lover, her son Quentin, and 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 Moss's disease.

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? And now, groups of religious extremists storm the medical laboratory building...

This is a rare case of a Russian novel written not about Russians and not for Russians. The author is not interested in Russia, its history, or its problems. Among the thirty characters, only two are originally from Russia, but they have long left their homeland and almost forgotten about it.

Despite being a substantial novel, it doesn't fit the mold of what is typically referred to as a "big Russian novel." According to the author, Sergei 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." What unites them is the authors' readiness to confront the reader with the unbearable: with depression, pain, suffering, and violence. "Moss's Meat Grinder" adds guilt and the torment of conscience to this list.

It's a bloody, terrifying, and brutal book, but through the darkness that the author immerses their characters in, a faint glimmer of hope for salvation still flickers.