

About the author:

KARINA SHAINYAN was born in Grozny, Chechnya, in 1976 and grew up in the town of Okha, northern Sakhalin. A graduate of Moscow State University with a degree in social psychology, she has spent more than two decades leading horseback expeditions through the wild landscapes of the Altai Mountains — an experience that infuses her recent novel, *Saspyga*, with raw authenticity and a deep sense of place.

Shainyan is the author of numerous short stories and several acclaimed novels. Her debut, *The Long Road to Bimini*, an urban fantasy laced with absurdist elements, won silver at the Star Bridge convention in Kharkiv and was named Best Debut at Eurocon.

In the past few years, her work has shifted from adventure and science fiction into the realms of magical realism and psychological thriller. Her novel *A Key Around Her Neck* was longlisted for the prestigious National Bestseller Prize and won the “Best Film Pitch” prize at the New Horizons Award in 2022. Shainyan’s recent novel, *Saspyga*, explores haunting folklore and the human psyche. Film adaptation rights to both *A Key Around Her Neck* and *Saspyga* have been sold.

After the publication of *Saspyga* in 2025, Shainyan chose to limit the novel’s promotion and declined nominations for major national awards.

Karina lives with her family in Tomsk, Western Siberia. Whenever she is not leading her next horse riding tour, she works on a new novel.



Selected Bibliography

- 2025 — **Saspyga**, *novel*
- 2022 — **A Key Around Her Neck**, *novel*
- 2016 — **The Colored Watch**, *novel*
- 2014 — **The Game. Snake Island**, *novel*
- 2010 — **The Long Road to Bimini**, *novel*
- 2009 — **The Life of Monsters**, *short stories*

Awards

- Longlisted for **the National Bestseller Prize** 2022
- Best Film Pitch **New Horizons Award** 2022
- Best Novel (Silver) **Star Bridge Award**, Kharkiv 2010
- Best Debut **Eurocon**, Cieszyn 2010



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Translation rights
All rights available

Audio rights
Vimbo

Film rights optioned

TV series in
development

Saspyga

Altai Gothic Noir

In the vein of Jim Jarmusch's *The Dead Man*, *Saspyga* takes you on a chilling odyssey of mysticism and transformation through the Altai Mountains, over the ridge to the spirit world. Among towering peaks, pristine valleys, crystal-clear rivers, and herds of horses, there hides a saspyga, whose meat quenches all sorrows.

The story unfolds in the Altai Mountains, in the present day, during a trek organized by a local horse-riding tourist camp. What begins as familiar campfire fare — local legends and eerie stories told to spook travelers — slowly entwines with a darker metaphysical drama centered on two women: Asya, who has fled the stifling monotony of her life in a big city (a proofreader's job, an ex-fiancé — mundane, almost laughably so), and Katya, the cook who accompanies the local horse tours.

When Asya breaks away from the main group, Katya is sent to find her. She tracks her down quickly enough, but Asya stubbornly refuses to return. She has chosen her own path — and Katya has no choice but to follow. Alone, the city-bred woman won't survive in the mountains, and Katya hopes she might still persuade her to come back.

But it soon becomes clear that the journey belongs to more than just the two of them. Asya, the land itself, the restless local spirits, even their horses — bearing, in uncanny fashion, the names of stallions torn apart by wolves five years ago — seem to harbor their own visions of what lies ahead.

And so Asya walks a trail once crossed, long ago, by Katya herself. Back then, Katya had joined a group of seasoned hunters in driving a saspyga, an elusive and dexterous inhabitant of the mountains with a seductively sweet meat, into a trap. Katya had nearly managed to banish that memory, to bury the horror — but now the past rises to meet her once more. The sweet meat of a saspyga, locals believe, can quench all sorrows. One should follow only one rule on the quest — to never look into the creature's face. Years ago, Katya broke the rule so the magic did not work on her. If only Katya can summon the courage to remember, if she resists the temptation to partake of the saspyga, if she looks into the face of the saspyga again — she may yet save Asya from an imminent, grim fate. There are many trails in the mountains to run away on, but only one way to return — by finding your own self.

Karina Shainyan sets her "Altai Gothic thriller" against probably the world's most mesmerizing scenery, where the suspense-drama plot weaves with the local lore and ethnic mythology. Shainyan probes the modern yearning for escape, asking what price one is truly willing to pay for the illusion of a life without troubles, and what it takes to remain human in the wild.

Selected quotes

The setting is the Altai, described with hyper-realistic precision: a sacred land, a mystical borderland where peonies and aconite bloom, where the dead come to life, and where something otherworldly shines clearly through the thin fabric of the everyday. <...> There are authors who can write about places and people with precision and affection, making them warm, alive, and instantly recognizable. There are authors who can spin dizzyingly gripping stories. But those who can do both are rare. Karina Shainyan's novel is at once a chilling, immersive horror, a tense psychological drama, and an inspired hymn to the Altai land.

Galina Yuzefovich
literary critic

Karina Shainyan's *Saspyga* defies description, demanding to be told in opposites. It is a novel of mysticism, where the Altai Mountains twist and shimmer, where time itself seems suspended, where horses once torn apart by wolves return alive, and where a strange feathered creature — the elusive saspyga, unspoken yet always sought — haunts the edges of the tale. And yet it is also starkly, almost painfully real: the mountains rendered with such precision that the very landscape seems

to push up through the page. *Saspyga* is at once spellbinding and elusive, timeless and acutely modern — a story that resists retelling.

Afisha

The rails of myth run in circles, which means a turn is always possible, which means at any moment the cart can break free and go off the tracks. But there is good news: since the turn is constant, it is never too late to jam the lever.

NATE magazine

Here [in the novel] is the everyday simplicity of looming horror, the fear woven into the ordinary — that something is there, just behind your back. [In *Saspyga*] *Stranger Things* are set in the Altai Mountains, among untrodden paths and jagged peaks. Here emerge a clarity and restraint that signal true mastery: in Shainyan's hands, the terrifying loses its fairytale quality and becomes reality itself, the very fabric of existence. Sit on a stump, eat a pie — before the pie eats you first.

Rules of Life magazine