



Denis Bushlatov



Valentin Dudnik

About the authors:

DENIS BUSHLATOV is a Ukrainian horror writer. His published work includes four novels and two collections of short stories. Several short stories were published in the English translation by Bewildering Stories and Kzine in the UK. In 2021 Bushlatov's short story *The Disintegrator* was included into the *Hex-Periments: A Dark Biotech Anthology*, edited by Keith Anthony Baird. Film rights to *One Who Does Not Sleep* have been sold. Denis also works as an interviewer and a journalist, with focus on horror.

Denis Bushlatov lives in Odessa, Ukraine. His work in progress in 2023 is the book on the war of Russia against Ukraine, based on his eye-witness experience and numerous interviews he has conducted since the invasion in February 2022.

VALENTIN DUDNIK was born in 1949 in Kopeisk in the Chelyabinsk Region, Russia. In 1967 he served as a sailor on board the icebreaker *Sibiryakov*. Dudnik graduated from the Odessa National Maritime Academy in Ukraine and the Baltic State Marine Academy in Kaliningrad, Russia. During 1975-1979 Dudnik sailed on whaleboats of the Soviet Ukrainian fleet. During 1992-2013 he served as a captain on international cargo ships. In 2011 Somali pirates held him hostage, as the captain of the cargo ship *Blida*. As the captain of the US ship *Seaman Guard Ohio* Dudnik was incarcerated in India from October 2013 until December 2017, two years of which were spent in Chennai high security prison .

Selected Bibliography

2020 — **The Captain**, *biography, non-fiction*

COVER NOT
AVAILABLE

Manuscript
Non-fiction; a naval biography, 2020
62,435 words

Audio rights sold
Storytel

The Captain

Papillon meets Captain Phillips in this shocking and heart-wrenching biographical drama, inspired by the true story of Valentin Dudnik. The Captain spans seven years of ordeals: ten months as a hostage of Somali pirates in 2011, then four years surviving detention after his 2013 arrest in India, where he was falsely accused and fought not only against the Indian court system, local hatred fanned by the media, and prejudices, but also a metastatic cancer.

On January 1, 2011, the bulk carrier *Blida* was hijacked by Somali pirates. Her international crew comprised of Ukrainians, Algerians, and Saudi Arabs was kept hostage for ten months until the ship's owners paid ransom. Captain Valentin Dudnik endured the ordeal of being held hostage with amazing strength, though each day brought both physical and psychological challenges, including numerous mock executions, beatings, massive dehydration, starvation, and abuse of some of the crew members by drugged unstable pirates.

This is why the decision Valentin Dudnik took in 2013 — agreeing to head the anti-pirate ship *Seaman Guard Ohio* — came as a shock to everyone but himself: the captain saw it as his duty to protect merchant ships from Somali pirates. *Seaman Guard Ohio*, owned by the American *AdvanFort* company, would provide an armed guard to escort ships across the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea known as *Pirate Alley*.

What happens next could be described in several lines on a Wikipedia page, but turned out to be a true nightmare for the captain and his crew. The Indian Coast Guard intercepted the US floating armory ship *Seaman Guard Ohio* in October 2013 off the port of Tuticorin and arrested thirty-five crew members, including captain Valentin Dudnik, accusing them of carrying arms illegally. The crew included twenty-three foreigners (fourteen Estonians, six British nationals and three Ukrainians) and twelve Indians. On 10 July 2014, a judge of the Madras High Court dismissed the charges against the crew and armed guards, while reaffirming that the captain and the fuel vendor were subject to punishment because the ship was refuelled with subsidized diesel fuel. On 1 July 2015, the Indian Supreme Court set aside the High Court's decision as "illegal and erroneous", and ordered the Tuticorin District Court to complete the trial of the case and give its judgment within six months. The Tuticorin court on January 2016 sentenced the crew to five years of rigorous imprisonment and imposed a fine. Seeking to suspend the judgement, the British appealed to the high court, claiming they were innocent and possessed arms for antipiracy activities.

On November 27, 2017 the court ruled that all charges against the men had been dropped and they should be released from custody, effective immediately. All crew members left India. Captain Valentin Dudnik returned home on death's door: from the beginning of their detention in 2013, he had been suffering from cancer that remained undiagnosed and untreated until 2017, despite his numerous pleas and appeals for testing if not treatment.

This book tells the story of the unimaginable hardships that the captain and the crew had to endure, abandoned by their employer, the American *AdvanFort* company, without payment or any legal support, and caught in the vortex of India's court and penal system. The narrative helps the reader to understand what Valentin Dudnik was feeling and thinking along the way, and to see the captain and the ship crew as human beings rather than subjects of a notorious controversial court case — this is something that newspaper articles and court reporting cannot deliver.

The captain and his crew spent months in Indian jails. They were barred from leaving the country while legal arguments flowed back and forth and they repeatedly heard mantras that "this will all soon be explained and then it will be over" and "this is India". The 2016 court decision took them completely unawares — the crew was convicted and sentenced to five years of severe imprisonment in a notorious Chennai prison. The captain stayed in a cell with criminals of all sorts and was treated as a terrorist, living in extremely severe conditions: in dirt, in inescapable humidity and stuffiness, and suffering from infectious diarrhoea, malnutrition, sickness, and dehydration. His sufferings worsened every day and there was never-ending pain because prostate cancer was quickly spreading and attacking his whole body, metastasizing to nearly every single organ. The prison authorities accused him of inventing his illness and denied him medical treatment until 2017, when the captain's condition had obviously become critical. Yet the worse punishment for the captain was oblivion and impotence in the face of the blind machine of the court. He knew that they had been falsely accused and wrongly convicted but they had neither legal nor financial help from the outside world to prove the contrary. The fact that the international crew was kept imprisoned for nearly four years under false accusations and with a lack of evidence is astonishing. According to the captain, the Indian authorities acted worse than the Somali pirates, who took the crew of *Seaman Guard Ohio* as hostage to set a precedent and place the controversial issues of international anti-pirate cooperation in the waters of the Indian Sea in the global limelight. Bail proved too high for the crew: the four years of detention, including two years in the Chennai prison, compromised the crew's physical and psychological health and may well have cost Captain Valentin Dudnik his life.

A detailed account of events is supported in the text through interviews that give voice to Captain Valentin Dudnik, chief engineer Valery Sidorenko, and other witnesses and participants of the *Seaman Guard Ohio* case, including lawyers, prison attendants, guards, and medical staff. Denis Bushlatov provides careful research of the ship's employer, *AdvanFort* company and its involvement — or, rather, its abandonment — of the case. Bushlatov writes at length about the company's background, its owners, and controversial criminal cases that the company was involved in during the past. Bushlatov and Dudnik succeed in creating a wrenching true story of survival, hardship, and an impregnable human will, while also raising issues about the unregulated and growing antipiracy industry in the world today.

As the authors state in the book's foreword, they are not making accusations, they are sharing a first-person account and bearing witness. They also make no attempt to intimidate, trying instead to warn seafarers against existing dangers. They are not seeking sympathy, they hope for understanding and insist on their right for justice.