

Between Two Fires By Joshua Yaffa PDF (Limited Copy)

Joshua Yaffa



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Between Two Fires By Joshua Yaffa Summary

Navigating Ambition and Compromise Under Putin's Atrocious
Regime.

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About the book

In **Between Two Fires**, journalist Joshua Yaffa presents a captivating exploration of contemporary Russia under Vladimir Putin's regime, focusing on the fractured lives of individuals navigating a landscape steeped in authoritarian control and personal ambition. Yaffa introduces a diverse array of characters, each representing the myriad ways in which ordinary Russians confront the pressures and perils of living within a state that demands both loyalty and conformity.

The chapter opens with a vivid portrayal of the head of a major television network, a powerful yet vulnerable figure whose career reflects the delicate balance between media influence and state censorship. Yaffa describes how this individual maneuvers through the complexities of broadcasting in a regime that tightly regulates public discourse, illustrating the compromises necessary to maintain both relevance and survival.

Next, the narrative shifts to a conflicted Orthodox priest, whose struggles symbolize the broader tensions within Russian society. This character grapples with the role of the church in a state that often intertwines governance with religious symbolism, highlighting the moral dilemmas faced by those who wish to uphold faith while confronting state interests. Yaffa depicts the priest's internal battle, providing insight into the spiritual compromises made in the face of pervasive political pressure.

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The chapter also features a Chechen humanitarian, offering a glimpse into the realities of life in a region marked by its own brutal politics and cultural complexities. This figure's challenges exemplify the harsh consequences of Russia's ongoing conflicts and the often-overlooked stories of resilience among those striving to provide aid and support in dire circumstances.

Through these richly drawn portraits, Yaffa artfully illustrates the broader themes of ambition, compromise, and survival. The contrasting paths taken by these characters reflect not only their personal choices but also the stark realities of a country grappling with the dual forces of authoritarianism and individual aspiration. Ultimately, **Between Two Fires** serves as a poignant commentary on the nature of power and the resilience of the human spirit amidst the contradictions of contemporary Russian life.

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About the author

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Chapter 1 Summary: Prologue: The Wily Man

PROLOGUE: THE WILY MAN

In the winter of 1987, sociologist Yuri Levada found new hope amid the shifting political landscape of the Soviet Union. At fifty-seven, Levada had long been sidelined; under the regime, sociology was dismissed as a mere pseudoscience. However, the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev and his policies of perestroika opened fresh avenues for research and expression. Levada, along with his colleagues, took the helm of the All-Union Center for Public Opinion Research (VTsIOM), marking the establishment of the Soviet Union's first large-scale polling organization.

Levada's earlier experiences had been fraught with challenges. In the 1960s, his lectures on sociological themes garnered both interest and danger, leading to professional isolation after the 1968 Prague Spring crackdown. During sixteen years spent in academic exile, he conceptualized "Homo sovieticus," a term used to describe the unique psychological makeup of individuals molded by the oppressive Soviet regime.

With VTsIOM, Levada tapped into public sentiment through surveys, revealing a society eager to voice their hopes and fears, which starkly contrasted with the prevailing Soviet ideologies. As political turmoil gripped



Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, Levada's findings illustrated a populace longing for transparency and honesty about their history, signaling a shift in societal attitudes.

Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, researchers noted that many public attitudes remained entrenched in previous Soviet ways. Levada redirected his focus to exploring the phenomenon of the "wily man," a term that encapsulates the clever survival strategies employed by citizens navigating the complexities of oppressive systems. This figure embodies a contradiction—someone adept at outsmarting bureaucratic hurdles while still shaped by a past governed by authoritarianism.

Levada's research significantly contributed to understanding the Russian psyche during and after the Soviet era, emphasizing recurring themes of adaptability, resilience, and latent compliance within society. The prologue encapsulates the intricate dynamics between the state and its citizens, revealing a landscape rife with power struggles, deception, and the survival tactics necessary for navigating their intricate realities.

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Chapter 2 Summary: Master of Ceremonies

Chapter 2: Master of Ceremonies

The pivotal role of Konstantin Ernst in Russian television emerged in December 1999, a crucial time marked by political transition and uncertainty. As the head of Channel One, Ernst prepared for the presidential New Year's address, playing a significant role in framing the country's political narrative. This tradition of presidential addresses, rooted in the era of Leonid Brezhnev, was carried forward by Boris Yeltsin, who faced considerable challenges amidst a backdrop of political and economic turmoil.

On December 27, 1999, Ernst recorded Yeltsin's surprising farewell address in which the president announced his resignation, transferring power to Vladimir Putin. This moment, filled with emotion, saw Yeltsin reflect on his presidency, openly acknowledging his failures and seeking forgiveness from the Russian people. The unexpected nature of this announcement set the stage for a critical shift in Russian governance and media.

Ernst's leadership coincided with a transformative period for Russian television. Following Yeltsin's resignation, Channel One played a crucial role in portraying Putin in a favorable light, depicting him as a resolute



leader capable of addressing the nation's pressing challenges. Ernst's background, rooted in a prominent Soviet family with a rich history in the scientific establishment and his formative experiences in film, equipped him with essential skills to navigate the newly emerging media landscape.

Channel One's influence extended beyond mere broadcasting; it became a vital mechanism for state propaganda while striving to maintain artistic integrity. This delicate balancing act was especially significant as Russia transitioned under Putin's leadership, raising ethical questions about the role of media in government narratives.

The network faced scrutiny for its approach to information warfare, particularly during high-profile crises, such as the tragic crash of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17. Channel One's dissemination of misleading narratives exemplified the broader challenges concerning media manipulation in contemporary Russia, bringing forth critical discussions about truth and accountability in journalism.

Despite increasing criticism and the escalating tensions within Russia's political environment, Konstantin Ernst remained a key figure in shaping state media. His adaptability and influence over programming ensured that Channel One retained its role as a cornerstone in both cultural identity and public sentiment within the context of a complex political climate.



In conclusion, Konstantin Ernst represents the intricate relationship between media and politics during a transformative era in Russian history. His work encapsulates the ongoing interplay between public perception and governmental representation, leaving a lasting legacy in state media that continues to resonate in modern Russia.

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Chapter 3 Summary: Beware of Dragons

Chapter 2: Beware of Dragons

The chapter opens with Heda Saratova, a mother grappling with the impending violence of war in Grozny, Chechnya. As Russian forces re-enter the city in 1999, a new, fierce phase of conflict begins, ignited by militant incursions into Dagestan. This incursion prompts Moscow to justify its military aggression in Chechnya, particularly under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin, who labels Chechen fighters as terrorists. This framing serves to bolster his political image amid rising domestic unrest.

At thirty-three, Heda is navigating personal challenges following her escape from a tumultuous marriage. Amid the destruction surrounding her, she endeavors to build a life for herself and her four-year-old son, even as many neighbors abandon the city in fear. The relentless artillery fire serves as a grim backdrop, underscoring the war's catastrophic impact on civilian life. Despite the chaos, Heda finds purpose caring for elderly neighbors who choose to stay, fostering a sense of community in a fractured environment.

Her experiences lead to a growing sympathy for the rebels fighting against the Russian military, whom she perceives as unjust aggressors. Heda's newfound resolve inspires her to support local guerrilla fighters and



document the atrocities inflicted upon Chechen residents, marking her transformation from a survivor to an informal chronicler of the conflict.

Receiving ominous warnings, Heda eventually flees to Ingushetia, where she connects with foreign journalists and human rights activists. This alliance empowers her, allowing her to aid in documenting human rights violations committed by Russian forces, drawing on her experiences to offer vital insights.

Heda's commitment to advocating for Chechen victims deepens as she gets involved with Memorial, a prominent human rights organization. The risks associated with her activism become palpable as she gathers crucial evidence of abuses while navigating the treacherous waters of conflict and repression.

A pivotal partnership develops between Heda and Natalia Estemirova, a fellow human rights advocate. Together, they undertake perilous missions to document the military's actions, balancing the stark realities of their environment with their unwavering dedication to justice.

As the war evolves, so too does the political landscape in Chechnya, characterized by shifting power dynamics and the rise of Ramzan Kadyrov. His regime introduces a new layer of complexity, forcing Heda to reassess her approach to activism and human rights amidst the changing circumstances.



In conclusion, Heda Saratova's journey from a mother caught in war to a prominent human rights advocate illustrates not only her personal evolution but also the broader themes of survival and the struggle for justice in a region deeply scarred by conflict. Her story embodies the intricate interactions between personal courage, political realities, and the quest for human dignity in the harrowing context of Chechnya's recent history.

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Chapter 4: The Last Free Priest

Summary of Chapter 4: The Last Free Priest

Tensions in Russia: The Prelude to Change

In the winter of 2012, Moscow was a hotbed of political unrest, fueled by allegations of electoral fraud during parliamentary elections. The dissatisfaction with Vladimir Putin's regime prompted tens of thousands to take to the streets, showcasing a growing divide between the authoritarian government and the disillusioned educated class demanding reform.

The Role of Religion in Politics

Against this backdrop, in February, Putin convened a meeting with key religious leaders, particularly Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church. This gathering underscored a concerning fusion of politics and religion, with Kirill publicly supporting Putin's leadership. However, this alliance raised alarms about the church's potential loss of independence, signaling a subservience to the state that many feared would erode its spiritual authority.

Father Pavel Adelgeim: A Voice of Dissent

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Standing against the church's alignment with the state was Father Pavel Adelgeim, a veteran priest who had lived through earlier repressions. He emerged as a powerful dissenting voice, advocating for the church's apolitical stance and critiquing the increasing bureaucracy within Orthodox Church governance, which he believed compromised its core mission.

Adelgeim's Struggle Against the Diocese

Adelgeim engaged in a fierce ideological battle with Archbishop Evsevii, the head of the Pskov diocese, marking a significant conflict over church authority. Adelgeim championed the idea of parish autonomy, but faced staunch resistance from the centralized administration that sought greater control over religious matters.

The Impact of the 1990s on the Church

The era of perestroika led to a resurgence of religious fervor in Russia, allowing priests like Adelgeim to connect positively with their communities. However, he remained wary of the church's drift towards nationalism and authoritarianism, which intensified in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, wary of a spiritual mission being co-opted for political ends.

Death and Legacy of Father Pavel

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Tragically, Father Pavel was murdered on August 5, 2013, by a troubled young man named Sergei Pchelintsev. The circumstances surrounding his death hinted at deeper political ramifications. His funeral became a significant event, highlighting his profound impact on the church and the

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Chapter 5 Summary: King of the Pride

Chapter 5 Summary: King of the Pride

In January 2014, Oleg Zubkov, a prominent figure in Crimea known for establishing private zoos, took his family to the French Alps for a ski vacation. Zubkov, who had fostered a close bond with the diverse animals in his parks, was well-regarded in Crimea for his humor and love for wildlife, even without formal animal care training.

To understand the context, Crimea's rich history includes its designation as a military stronghold and a tranquil retreat, particularly during the Crimean War and later under Soviet rule. Following the Soviet Union's dissolution, the region's population became predominantly ethnically Russian, with many residents emotionally connected to Russia.

In late 2013, Ukraine plunged into political turmoil under President Viktor Yanukovich, whose corrupt leadership sparked massive protests in Kyiv. Although Zubkov disapproved of Yanukovich, he did not immediately join the protests, largely because sentiments in Crimea favored closer connections with Russia, rather than European integration.

While in Kyiv, Zubkov witnessed the intensity of the Maidan protests,



feeling anxious about the rising anti-Russian sentiment, which alienated many Russian-speaking residents in Crimea. Nevertheless, Zubkov remained absorbed in his business endeavors, feeling distanced from the national unrest.

As the political crisis escalated, Yanukovych fled amidst fears of aggressive nationalism toward Crimea's Russian-speaking populace. Alarmed by the unrest among the youth, local leaders swiftly organized a referendum seeking to join Russia, appealing to the dominant sentiments of Crimea's Russian majority. Zubkov participated in the vote, feeling a mix of hope and relief, convinced that joining Russia would stabilize his business and enhance community welfare.

Post-annexation, Zubkov initially viewed the future positively under Russian governance. However, his optimism was soon overshadowed by challenges. He encountered significant hurdles due to escalated state interference and complex bureaucratic processes that stifled his entrepreneurial spirit. The initial promises of better conditions from the Russian government began to unravel, leaving Zubkov grappling with legal disputes and rising government oversight.

Compounding his struggles were entanglements with local authorities, such as Galina Perelovich, which exemplified the bureaucratic tensions characterizing the new Russian Crimea. Zubkov found himself caught



between compliance and a fight for his rights, often facing inspections and fines as he resisted bureaucratic encroachments.

Amid these challenges, Zubkov reflected on the realities of the annexation—his initial hopes had given way to disillusionment. Despite the obstacles he faced, he clung to nostalgic memories of the "Crimean Spring," demonstrating his commitment to his parks against a backdrop of uncertainty. This chapter underscores the delicate balance of aspiration and the harshness of state governance in contemporary Crimea, capturing the broader struggles shared by its populace after the political shift.

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Chapter 6 Summary: Notes on Camp

Chapter 6 Summary of "Between Two Fires"

Historical Context and National Sentiment

The annexation of Crimea, a strategic move by Russia, ignited a long-held yearning for the country's imperial legacy. This event, seen not only as a reclamation of territory but also as a quest for national purpose, intensified feelings of resentment towards Western powers in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse. The unrest in eastern Ukraine further fueled this aggressive nationalism, marking a shift in Russia's political demeanor that pushed the country toward confrontation with the West.

Internal Politics and Public Discourse

In response to rising tensions, President Putin's administration strategically exploited fears of "internal enemies," colloquially referred to as the "fifth column." This narrative allowed for tighter state control over dissenting voices and fostered a revival of historical discourses that painted the West as a malevolent force. State-run media propagated conspiracy theories targeting critics of the regime and systematically targeted cultural institutions that advocated for discourse on the repressive aspects of Soviet history.

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The Rise and Fall of Perm-36

Perm-36, once a crucial memorial dedicated to the victims of Soviet political repression, was established by committed historians and activists aiming to highlight this dark chapter of history. However, as the Kremlin's policies evolved, the memorial faced existential threats that culminated in a state-led takeover. The institution found itself at odds with the rising tide of nationalist sentiments, raising alarms about an impending historical revisionism that could distort public memory.

The Struggle Over Soviet History

Perm-36 became a focal point for intense debates surrounding the representation of Soviet history. The memorial grappled with how to appropriately commemorate political prisoners while addressing the multifaceted narratives of wartime experiences. Within broader Russian society, there were ongoing struggles to wrestle with the legacy of the Soviet state, leading many to confront unsettling questions of guilt and collective memory, often revising historical perspectives to align with contemporary political agendas.

New Administration and Challenges

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As new personnel, primarily bureaucrats lacking historical expertise, took over Perm-36, the museum's narrative shifted towards a more state-sanctioned portrayal of history. Although efforts were made to maintain operations, many exhibits were sanitized, diluting their critical perspectives and stripping away the museum's core mission of fostering civic engagement around Russia's complex historical landscape.

Cultural Evolution and Civic Engagement

The transformation of Perm-36 into a state-controlled entity epitomizes the ongoing struggle to balance the preservation of historical truths with the demands of the prevailing political atmosphere. Local activists and cultural figures strive to navigate these turbulent waters, advocating for the retention of vital narratives surrounding resistance, repression, and national identity in an environment increasingly dominated by state-imposed constructs.

Conclusion

The trajectory of Perm-36 highlights the broader challenges faced by Russian society in reconciling its tumultuous past with current realities. The shifting political environment poses significant threats to the integrity of historical memory, often molding the truth to fit the interests of those in power. Ensuring institutional independence is crucial in preventing the repeat of historical injustices within the context of contemporary



governance.

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Chapter 7 Summary: Hell on Earth

Chapter 6: Hell on Earth

This chapter centers on Elizaveta Glinka, affectionately known as "Doctor Liza," a dedicated physician who devoted over two years to humanitarian efforts in war-torn regions, particularly Donbass in Ukraine and Syria. Glinka's poignant journey is underscored by her deep commitment to helping victims of conflict, driven by an innate compassion for the weak and vulnerable amidst the chaos of war.

Glinka's humanitarian missions involved delivering vital medical supplies and support to those affected by violence, earning her significant recognition in Russia for her selfless actions. However, her work was not without its challenges; her association with government officials led to skepticism about her intentions, complicating her otherwise noble efforts.

Drawing from her familial legacy, Glinka sought to mimic her mother, a doctor herself, igniting her passion for medicine. Early in her career, she established a hospice in Kyiv, focusing on providing compassionate care and dignity to terminally ill patients in a system often indifferent to the dying.

The onset of conflict in Ukraine marked a turning point in Glinka's life.

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Motivated by a desire to assist injured children, she began frequenting Donbass, which placed her at the intersection of humanitarian work and state involvement. Although she aimed to remain impartial, the logistical support provided by the state increasingly entangled her in political complexities.

As her humanitarian endeavors garnered attention, Glinka received recognition from the Kremlin. While acknowledging the inherent political implications of her activities, she justified her actions as necessary for the greater good, believing that aiding those in need outweighed her association with the state.

However, her popularity was met with rising criticism from segments of society that viewed her cooperation with the government as morally questionable. The escalating conflict forced Glinka into the political spotlight, resulting in a gradual estrangement from some of her original supporters in the liberal circles of Russian society.

Glinka's humanitarian work extended to Syria, where she continued her mission under state sponsorship. This expansion further complicated the ethical landscape surrounding her efforts, as public perception fluctuated in response to her entanglement with a government implicated in the very conflicts she sought to resolve.

In conclusion, Elizaveta Glinka's narrative serves as a profound exploration



of the tensions between humanitarian ideals and the harsh realities of political conflict. Despite the increasing complications surrounding her work, her unwavering dedication to alleviating suffering highlights the moral ambiguities faced by those committed to humanitarian missions in troubled times. Her journey embodies the struggle of aiding the afflicted while grappling with the intricate web of power and politics that defines war.

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Chapter 8: Subtle Creatures

Chapter 7: Subtle Creatures

Premiere of Nureyev at the Bolshoi Theatre

In December 2017, the Bolshoi Theatre hosted the premiere of a ballet centered on Rudolf Nureyev, a celebrated ballet dancer who famously defected from the Soviet Union. This grand event attracted the Russian elite and bore striking resemblance to a Communist Party congress. Directed by Kirill Serebrennikov, the production not only honored Nureyev's extraordinary talent but also explored his personal battles against the constraints of conformity imposed by Soviet society. Ironically, at that time, Serebrennikov was under house arrest, accused of embezzling funds, a situation seen as a stark reflection of the Kremlin's tightening grip on artistic and cultural expression.

The Context of Serebrennikov's Arrest

Serebrennikov's arrest sparked intense debate about the Kremlin's intentions towards its cultural figures. His situation signified a disturbing trend in contemporary Russian politics, which was shifting towards a more oppressive and authoritarian stance. Particularly telling was the prior



cancellation of Nureyev's original premiere in July 2017, rumored to have been influenced by the ballet's themes of homosexuality—a subject matter that faced increasing scrutiny and criticism from conservative factions within the government.

Serebrennikov's Role in Russian Theatre

Historically, Serebrennikov had been a pioneering force in modern theater, renowned for his innovative productions that initially garnered state support as part of a cultural modernization effort. This initiative aimed to promote vibrant and cutting-edge art to both domestic and international audiences. However, the political landscape began to deteriorate following the widespread protests of 2011-2012, leading to a shift towards a more conservative ideology and a correspondingly diminished support for avant-garde artistic endeavors.

Censorship and Tensions in the Arts

As political repression intensified, artists faced increasing censorship, with state officials scrutinizing and often blocking works deemed provocative. Serebrennikov's ambitious efforts, particularly his modern reinterpretations of classic Russian literature, encountered growing hostility from a paranoid state apparatus. Ultimately, his arrest for alleged financial wrongdoing linked to his theater company epitomized the harsh consequences of artistic



boldness within an oppressive regime.

Reflection on Responsibility and Compromise

In light of Serebrennikov's plight, many artists and cultural figures began to

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Chapter 9 Summary: Epilogue: Fathers and Sons

Epilogue: Fathers and Sons

In April 2019, Kirill Serebrennikov, a prominent Russian theater director, was unexpectedly released from house arrest after enduring over a year of legal battles that threatened his career and freedom. Although he remained under the cloud of ongoing charges that could lead to severe penalties, this easing of restrictions hinted at a potential shift in the Kremlin's stance. Seizing the opportunity, Serebrennikov returned to the theater scene and celebrated his achievements at the Golden Mask Festival, where he received commendations for his artistic contributions despite the political pressures he faced.

The narrative then shifts to reveal the plight of Ksenia Sokolova, who took the helm of the charity Fair Aid following the death of its beloved founder, Doctor Liza. Initially filled with hope of honoring Liza's legacy, Sokolova soon encountered a hostile environment characterized by scrutiny and suspicion from government officials. This tension escalated, ultimately forcing her to flee the country in search of safety. The starkly different trajectories of Serebrennikov and Sokolova underscore the broader struggles of individuals navigating their identities and roles within a capricious political landscape.



Through these stories, the text explores the moral dilemmas faced by citizens under state pressure. It highlights the intricate dance of survival in a repressive regime where ethical compromises threaten to skew societal values. As corruption persists, individuals grapple with the challenge of aligning personal advantages with the greater good, revealing the deep complexities of conscience amidst adversity.

As societal tensions mount, a noticeable generational divide emerges, particularly among Russian youth who yearn for change but find themselves constrained by the status quo. Their aspirations for a transformed future are at odds with the enduring remnants of Putin's regime, creating an uncertain path ahead. This new generation's struggle will be pivotal as they confront their own expectations and the weight of history.

In conclusion, the epilogue encapsulates the nuanced relationship between individuals and authority in contemporary Russia. While the Kremlin maintains its hold on power, there are signs of a growing civic awareness that may reshape the landscape for future generations, suggesting that a vital reckoning with the past and present could herald transformative change.

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