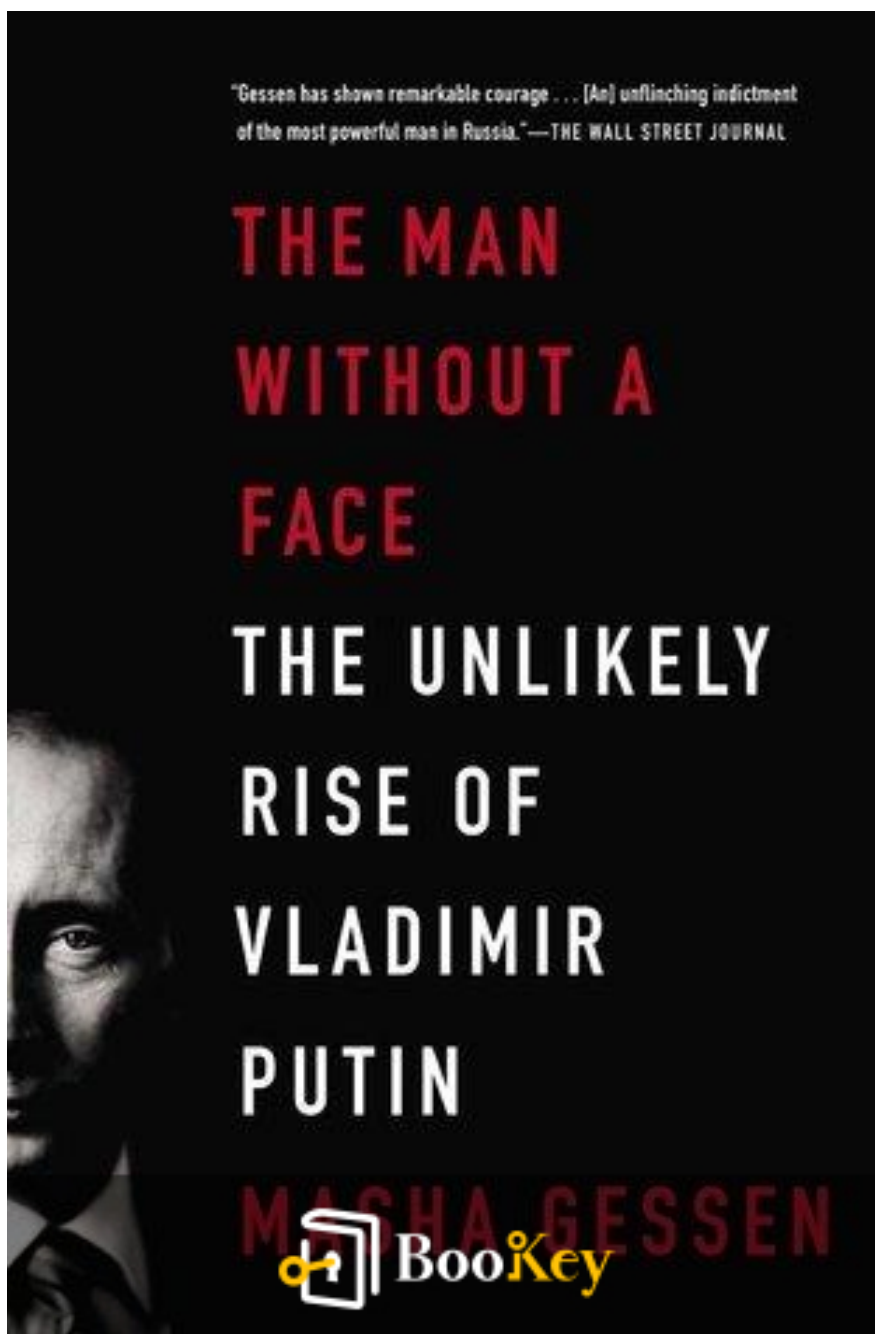


The Man Without A Face PDF (Limited Copy)

Masha Gessen



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The Man Without A Face Summary

Unmasking the Rise of Putin and His Dismantling of Democracy.

Written by New York Central Park Page Turners Books Club

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About the book

In **The Man Without a Face**, Masha Gessen offers a profound exploration of Vladimir Putin's unsettling rise from a relatively obscure KGB operative to the pinnacle of Russian power. This narrative begins in the chaotic aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, a period marked by political turbulence and the eventual emergence of Boris Yeltsin, Russia's first president. As Yeltsin's health and administration faltered, a select group of oligarchs, known as "the family," sought a successor who could maintain their interests while stabilizing the nation—leading to Putin's unexpected selection as a puppet leader.

Initially, Putin captivated both the Russian public and the Western world with his promises of reform and modernization. He was portrayed as a strong leader ready to restore order amid the chaos left in Yeltsin's wake. However, Gessen reveals that behind this charismatic façade lay a ruthless ambition. Putin's ascent was characterized by a systematic dismantling of democratic structures; he silenced dissenting voices, exiled political opponents, and manipulated the electoral process to ensure his grip on power.

Gessen, drawing from her experiences as a journalist in Moscow, presents a detailed account of how Putin consolidated authority. Through a series of strategic moves, he surrounded himself with loyalists and implemented

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policies that increased state control over various sectors, undermining the very foundations of Russian democracy. The term "faceless man" becomes a chilling metaphor for Putin, who, beneath his public persona, orchestrated a profound and often brutal realignment of power that left the nation under a deeply corrupt regime.

Overall, Gessen's incisive narrative not only chronicles Putin's rise but also reflects on the broader implications for Russia and the international community. The book serves as a crucial historical account, revealing the dynamics of power, manipulation, and the disintegration of democratic ideals, ultimately capturing a pivotal moment in contemporary history.

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About the author

Masha Gessen, an influential American-Russian journalist and author, has a rich and complex background that deeply informs their work. Born in 1967 into an Ashkenazi Jewish family in Russia, Gessen faced anti-Semitism and moved to the United States in 1981. The experience of being an immigrant shaped their worldview and later reporting. They returned to Russia in 1991, a time when the country was undergoing tremendous upheaval, particularly highlighted by the Chechen Wars. During this period, Gessen reported on Russian military actions, demonstrating a commitment to exposing the realities of war and conflict.

Gessen's work has often put them at the intersection of significant social and political issues. Their fearless reporting on political activism in Russia did not go unnoticed; in 2013, threats from prominent Russian officials forced Gessen to leave the country once again and return to the U.S. As a non-binary individual who uses they/them pronouns, Gessen has emerged as an important voice regarding LGBT rights and gender issues.

In their writing, Gessen has contributed to various esteemed publications, including *The New Republic*, *New Statesman*, *Granta*, and *Slate*. Currently, Gessen serves as a staff writer for *The New Yorker*, where they focus on international politics, particularly the dynamics within Russia and the broader implications for global society. Their unique perspective, informed

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by both personal experience and rigorous journalism, offers profound insights into contemporary issues surrounding identity, governance, and human rights. Throughout their work, Gessen emphasizes the interconnectedness of personal and political narratives, inviting readers to engage deeply with the subjects at hand.

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chapter 1 Summary: THE ACCIDENTAL PRESIDENT

Chapter 1: The Accidental President

In 1999, the political landscape of Russia was marked by turmoil under President Boris Yeltsin, whose health was failing and approval ratings were plummeting. Yeltsin had repeatedly reshuffled his cabinet in an attempt to regain public trust, but his erratic behavior only heightened alienation among supporters and deepened political divisions. This era was characterized by a profound disillusionment; Russians were grappling with hyperinflation, widespread economic inequality, and an unsettling lack of political stability. Although there were some signs of economic progress from privatization initiatives, these efforts failed to alleviate public fears, leading many citizens to yearn for a stronger, more stable national identity.

In this context, key figures within Yeltsin's inner circle, known as the "Family," became increasingly anxious about the impending end of Yeltsin's presidency. Among them, Boris Berezovsky, a powerful oligarch, recognized the urgent need for a viable successor. Despite his relatively obscure status, Berezovsky saw potential in Vladimir Putin, a former KGB agent and head of the Federal Security Service (FSB). Initially met with skepticism regarding Putin's experience, Berezovsky viewed him as a malleable candidate who could be easily guided.

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Berezovsky's strategy culminated in Yeltsin appointing Putin as prime minister, a decision made in the hopes of stabilizing a chaotic political environment while protecting Yeltsin's legacy. This pivotal moment reflected both Yeltsin's desperation for continuity and his lack of understanding of Putin's true potential. The choice of Putin as heir apparent would soon set the stage for significant shifts in Russian politics, illustrating a mix of hope for order amidst disorder and a gamble on an untested leader.

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chapter 2 Summary: THE ELECTION WAR

THE ELECTION WAR

Overview of Bombings

In September 1999, a series of devastating bombings began in Moscow, starting with an explosion at a shopping mall. This initial attack was followed by more explosions that targeted residential buildings across the country, resulting in numerous casualties and widespread panic among the Russian populace. Many citizens, including journalists, pointed fingers at Chechen terrorists, which exacerbated existing ethnic tensions and led to increased detentions of young Chechen men by the police.

Public Reaction and Government Response

In the face of growing fear, neighborhoods organized patrols to safeguard their communities. Amidst this chaotic environment, a police investigation in the town of Ryazan discovered suspicious bags filled with explosives. Initially treated as a credible terrorist threat, the situation was quickly downplayed by FSB (Federal Security Service) officials, who claimed it was merely a "training exercise." This dissonance between local and governmental narratives left the public bewildered and heightened distrust

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towards the state.

Putin's Rise to Power

With the bombings catalyzing a dramatic shift in political dynamics, President Boris Yeltsin, facing mounting pressures, appointed Vladimir Putin as acting president on New Year's Eve of 1999. This strategic decision was marketed as a move towards stability amidst chaos. Capitalizing on the prevailing fears, Putin adopted a hardline stance against terrorism, thus rapidly enhancing his popularity and presenting himself as a strong leader capable of safeguarding the nation.

Campaign Manipulations

Boris Berezovsky, a powerful oligarch and media mogul, played a significant role in crafting Putin's public persona as a reformist leader appealing to a weary population. As fears over security grew, Putin's party gained significant momentum in the December 1999 parliamentary elections, reflecting how the collective anxiety influenced the electorate's choice.

Exploring the Ryazan Incident

The Ryazan incident became a focal point of controversy, particularly as

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inconsistencies regarding the FSB's "training exercise" narrative came to light. Local residents and media voices raised doubts about the FSB's explanations, prompting speculation about whether the agency had orchestrated the bombings to justify military action and strengthen Putin's growing authority.

Berezovsky's Reflections

In later years, Berezovsky expressed a shift in perspective, suggesting that it was plausible the FSB had orchestrated the bombings to induce fear and forge a sense of unity among the Russian people. This manipulation would ultimately serve to consolidate Putin's hold on power, shaping Russia's political trajectory.

Conclusion

While official narratives continue to contend that Chechen terrorists were behind the bombings, a growing body of analysts posits that the FSB intertwined its motivations with political ambitions. This period marked a crucial turning point in Russian leadership, as the bombings not only catalyzed Vladimir Putin's ascent but also raised fundamental questions about the intentions and actions of the security apparatus during a tumultuous time in the nation's history.

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chapter 3 Summary: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A THUG

Chapter 3: The Autobiography of a Thug

Putin's Early Life and Persona

In this chapter, we delve into the formative years of Vladimir Putin, as constructed by a group of biographers facing the challenge of a tight deadline and limited sources. Their portrayal of Putin is deeply influenced by the postwar atmosphere of Leningrad, a city marked by trauma from the devastating Siege of Leningrad, which left its residents grappling with loss, hardship, and a drive for resilience. Born in 1952, Putin's childhood unfolds against this gritty backdrop, infusing his character with a hardened persona reflective of the city's struggles.

The Siege of Leningrad

The Siege, a harrowing episode in World War II, resulted in the deaths of over a million civilians due to starvation and relentless airstrikes. The survivors were left with haunting memories, which lingered through

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generations and shaped a collective psyche emphasizing resilience and toughness. For Putin, growing up in an environment imbued with such trauma left an indelible mark, as many embraced a sense of ferocity born from survival.

Putin's Family Background

Putin's parents were among the survivors of the Siege, but their experiences left scars. His father, who returned disabled from the war, and his mother, who had endured the loss of another child, navigated life in a city still struggling to recover. The complexities of their family dynamics were juxtaposed with the broader societal tragedies, yet the unity within the Putin household offered a semblance of luck amidst adversity. Vladimir's birth in such circumstances was seen as extraordinary, setting the stage for a life defined by resilience.

Mythology and Persona Creation

As he emerged from a challenging upbringing, Putin actively crafted a public persona that resonated with the toughness associated with Leningrad. Growing up in communal housing, he experienced the struggles and conflicts of shared living, often engaging in fights that would bolster his

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reputation. This toughened environment, combined with acts of rebellion, laid the groundwork for a childhood steeped in a thug culture, preparing Putin for future adversities.

Childhood and Thug Culture

Throughout his youth, encounters with local thugs were commonplace, compelling Putin to fight back against any humiliation. His school years mirrored this pattern, where a blend of aggression and social isolation marked his experience. While not academically exceptional, he became a notable figure through acts of assertiveness, eventually thriving academically as he channeled his energy productively, albeit still prone to conflict.

Transformation through Combat Training

At age ten, Putin's aggressive tendencies found a new outlet in martial arts, specifically Sambo. Despite initial parental resistance, this training became a transformative pivot, enabling him to focus his aggression into disciplined combat skills. As Putin envisioned a future in the KGB, where physical prowess was respected and essential, he honed his abilities in preparation for a career influenced by notions of power and authority.

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Aspirations for a Career in the KGB

Putin's fascination with the KGB ignited during his teenage years, coinciding with a growing cultural glamorization of the secret police within Soviet society. His father's connections hinted at a potential path to the organization, and Putin's relentless ambition ultimately led to his acceptance into the KGB—a significant achievement that fulfilled his aspirations for power and influence.

Life in East Germany and the Dissolution of the Soviet Union

Assigned to a KGB post in East Germany, Putin's life was marked by the tensions surrounding the regime's legitimacy. As he witnessed the protests culminating in the fall of the Berlin Wall, a crisis of identity emerged for him. In a desperate measure to protect himself, he destroyed sensitive KGB documents, highlighting the disorientation he faced as the political landscape rapidly shifted.

Return to Leningrad

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Putin's return to the Soviet Union was fraught with disappointment as he confronted a landscape starkly different from his previous experiences in Germany. Stripped of comforts, he faced a reality filled with scarcity and disillusionment, mirroring the broader upheavals in Russia. Yet, his persistent yearning for power and influence would ultimately propel him into a prominent position within a reshaped political arena.

The chapter concludes by reflecting on how Putin's childhood influences, experiences during the Siege, and the tumult of early adulthood intricately intertwined, shaping him into a leader emblematic of Russia's complex and often tumultuous history.

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chapter 4: ONCE A SPY

Chapter 4 Summary

Historical Context of St. Petersburg

The chapter opens by situating St. Petersburg—historically known as Petrograd and Leningrad—against the backdrop of Russian history. Once the imperial capital, the city witnessed a dramatic decline following World War I. The narrative tracks its descent from a glittering center of power to a devastated city marked by political purges and warfare. The aftermath of World War II saw an influx of new residents, leading to overcrowding and urban decay, while its cultural elite faced stiff repression, shaping a uniquely complicated social fabric.

Emergence of Dissent in the 1980s

As the 1980s unfolded, St. Petersburg became a crucible for dissent against the Communist Party. A pivotal moment occurred in March 1987 with the demolition of the Angletterre Hotel, igniting public protests and signaling a shift towards heightened civil activism. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev introduced policies like **perestroika** (restructuring) and **glasnost** (openness), which lifted some repressive constraints and encouraged public

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discourse on political issues.

Formation of Informal Groups and the People's Front

As civic dialogue expanded, informal groups began to surface, operating outside of any formalized structure but with a clear intention to challenge the state. The chapter highlights grassroots initiatives, particularly the Battle of the Angleterre rally, which illuminated a growing civic awareness. This organic movement eventually led to the establishment of the People's Front, an organization dedicated to democratizing the Soviet landscape, fostering open discussions and mobilizing citizens.

Conflict and Protests

The chapter further explores the ethnic tensions that erupted in 1988, particularly between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Residents of Leningrad demonstrated support for Armenians, indicating how local activism intertwined with national issues and reflected the socio-political complexities of the time.

Political Shifts and Elections

A significant turning point came during the 1989 elections, where pro-democracy candidates notably challenged the Communist monopoly.

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Emerging leaders like Marina Salye epitomized this shift by advocating for reform, illustrating a broader movement toward democratization in what was once a stagnant political environment.

Putin's Rise in Politics

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chapter 5 Summary: A COUP AND A CRUSADE

A Coup and a Crusade: Summary

Introduction to Marina Salye

Marina Salye emerges as a vital figure in the narrative of Russia during a critical juncture in its history, particularly the 1990s. Living in a secluded village, she preserved important archival materials related to a notorious scandal involving missing meat, a reflection of the widespread chaos surrounding food shortages during the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Context of the 1990s Soviet Union

By January 1990, the Soviet Union was enveloped in severe ethnic tensions, leading to violent pogroms and significant civilian suffering. Major cities, notably Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg), faced acute food shortages, prompting public protests over basic necessities. Salye, appointed to the food supplies committee of the Leningrad City Council, became instrumental in mitigating unrest by resourcefully securing essential goods like cigarettes for demonstrators.

The August Coup of 1991

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The narrative shifts to August 1991, when hardline Communist officials staged a coup to depose Mikhail Gorbachev, driven by increasing instability within the empire. Key political players, including Boris Yeltsin and Salye, emerged as prominent leaders of resistance in both Leningrad and Moscow against the coup orchestrated by the State Committee for the State of Emergency (GKChP).

Chaos and Resistance

As the coup unfolded, political leaders grappled with panic and disorganization. While Yeltsin boldly confronted the coup in Moscow, Salye rallied the city council and public in Leningrad to initiate counter-resistance. This period was marked by a chaotic confrontation between disorganized hardliners and spirited democrats, ultimately igniting widespread public mobilization against the coup.

Coup's Collapse

The coup's foundation crumbled rapidly due to blunders in military strategy and an unexpected surge of public defiance. Gorbachev's return to Moscow marked a critical turning point in Russian politics, leading to the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

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Post-Coup Investigations and Emergence of Putin

In the wake of the coup's failure, Salye began uncovering discrepancies in food distribution and a questionable meat deal involving Vladimir Putin, who was then ascending within the political hierarchy. Her investigations indicated a troubling pattern of corruption that was emerging in the reconfigured power dynamics. Unfortunately, her warnings regarding Putin's unethical dealings largely went unheeded, allowing him to solidify his political standing.

Putin's Rise to Power

As the political tumult continued in post-Soviet Russia, the focus shifted to Putin's surreptitious rise within the city administration, characterized by suspicious contracts and a reputation for underhanded tactics. Salye's early cautions about Putin's actions were disregarded as the political landscape rapidly evolved.

The Dangers of Political Truth

Years later, Salye's efforts to expose corruption faced increasing resistance and isolation. The cultural shift towards impunity and fear was exacerbated by leaders like Yeltsin, whose authoritarian tendencies ultimately led to the dissolution of the St. Petersburg City Council, further stifling political

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dissent.

Conclusion and Legacy

The chapter concludes with Salye's withdrawal from the political arena, recognizing the precariousness of her situation. Her observations on Putin's rise and the deepening corruption in Russia underscore the fraught relationship between political ambition and systemic dysfunction, casting a long shadow over the future of Russian governance and highlighting the challenges of accountability in turbulent times.

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chapter 6 Summary: THE END OF A REFORMER

Chapter 6: The End of a Reformer

In February 2000, a significant transformation occurred in public perception of Vladimir Putin. Initially presented as a potential democratic reformer, he swiftly transitioned into an image of authoritarian rule, a shift that his political strategists and allies, particularly Anatoly Sobchak, did not foresee. Sobchak, once a mentor to Putin and a proponent of democratic ideals, found himself bewildered by this change, as he, too, had fostered a deep-seated skepticism towards the very democratic processes he once advocated.

The backdrop of the 1990s illustrates a turbulent period in Russia, characterized by the emergence of new political and business elites. Figures like Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Mikhail Prokhorov initially sought to champion philanthropic ideals and steer Russia toward democracy. However, their vision clashed with the prevailing sentiment among Putin and Sobchak, who instead nurtured an anti-democratic stance shaped by the political turbulence of their times.

Unlike his peers, Putin approached politics devoid of romantic ideals. His loyalty was firmly rooted in the KGB legacy and the Soviet Union's historical narrative, leading him to favor a closed, controlled political system

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that allowed no dissent. This outlook significantly influenced his governance style, as he focused on consolidating power while managing both the economy and media narratives in St. Petersburg.

The crumbling political landscape further impacted Sobchak, who faced devastating unpopularity by 1996 due to economic decline in St. Petersburg. Despite his elitist demeanor, he misjudged public sentiment, failing to recognize Putin's deft political maneuvering, which included suppressing dissent and controlling information. This oversight ultimately led to Sobchak's ill-fated re-election attempt, as he remained oblivious to the shift away from his support.

As Sobchak's political stature diminished, Putin's influence grew. Serving as Sobchak's deputy, Putin effectively managed the flow of information within the government, silently orchestrating his boss's downfall. Following a bitter electoral defeat, Sobchak became embroiled in fears of legal repercussions linked to corruption, while Putin began to solidify his rise to power.

Stripped of political influence, Sobchak sought refuge in Paris, only to later attempt a return to Russia in hopes of reclaiming his former role. However, his efforts were in vain, and he ultimately slipped into obscurity, meeting an untimely and suspicious death. The circumstances surrounding his demise sparked speculation regarding potential foul play, raising questions about his legacy and the influence he wielded over Putin's trajectory. In stark contrast,

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Putin publicly mourned Sobchak, all while rumors circulated about his possible involvement in the events leading to Sobchak's tragic end. This duality in sentiment highlights the complexities of political allegiance and betrayal during this tumultuous period in Russian history.

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chapter 7 Summary: THE DAY THE MEDIA DIED

Chapter 7: The Day the Media Died

In this chapter, the author recounts the significant events of Election Day in Chechnya on March 26, 2000, during a turbulent period in Russian history marked by Vladimir Putin's ascendance to power. The election, characterized by a troubling lack of transparency and public involvement, was viewed as a pivotal moment as Putin crafted his image as a robust leader in a nation seeking stability.

Upon arriving in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, the author is struck by the city's devastation from previous conflicts. The once-vibrant urban landscape now lies in ruins, enveloped in a heavy silence that amplifies the haunting remnants of destruction. Makeshift signs express the faint traces of human life, overshadowed by the pervasive despair. Loudspeakers relay instructions directing what few residents remain to polling stations, yet the atmosphere is far from celebratory, as aid remains conspicuously absent.

At the polling stations, the author observes a somber assembly of primarily women, many of whom appear less interested in the democratic process than in securing humanitarian assistance. Their stories are filled with loss and tragedy, reflecting the enduring impact of war. Despite their hardships, a

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sliver of hope emerges among some voters who yearn for stability under Putin's government, revealing the complex emotional landscape of a population caught between despair and misplaced optimism.

The narrative shifts focus to the aftermath of the election, highlighting the alarming transformation of media in Russia during Putin's early presidency. Following his inauguration on May 7, 2000, the author describes a systematic crackdown on independent journalism, exemplified by a violent raid on Media-Most, a leading media organization, and the subsequent arrest of its founder, Vladimir Gusinsky. This pivotal moment signifies the authoritarian consolidation of power and the erosion of press freedoms, which would dictate the future of public discourse in Russia.

The chapter further examines the sinking of the submarine Kursk shortly after Putin took office. The botched rescue operation serves as a stark reminder of government mismanagement and a failure to resonate with the public's feelings during a national tragedy, exacerbating the distrust in official narratives.

In conclusion, this chapter encapsulates a critical transition in Russia's political landscape, where the manipulation of media and authoritarian governance intertwine to suppress dissent and shape public perception. As independent media voices diminish, the author warns of a dangerous "totalizing lie" that begins to envelop Russian society, signaling the advent

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of a new era dominated by state control over communication and thought.

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chapter 8: THE DISMANTLING OF DEMOCRACY

Chapter 8: The Dismantling of Democracy

Rapid Political Changes in Russia

After Vladimir Putin assumed the presidency in 2000, analysts grappled with the rapid transformation of Russia's political environment. Many voiced their concerns about the apparent decline of democracy, noting that beneath the surface of stability lay deep-rooted issues reminiscent of the chaotic post-Soviet period. The country contended with an identity crisis, struggling to define its political and national character in the wake of the Soviet Union's dissolution.

State Symbols and Identity Crisis

This national identity crisis was further illustrated by Russia's fluctuating use of state symbols. In an effort to move away from Soviet imagery, the post-1991 government faced challenges in establishing a new national iconography. The revival of the Soviet anthem during Putin's tenure reflects a nostalgic yearning for the past, which resonated with segments of the population while alienating those who supported the ideals of the 1991 revolution aimed at democratization.

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Consolidation of Power

As Putin began to consolidate power shortly after taking office, he enacted laws that eroded the democratic framework put in place during the 1990s. The upper house of parliament transitioned from an elected body to one filled with appointed members, while governors were granted limited autonomy and could be dismissed at will. This consolidation signified a significant departure from the democratic principles that had previously begun to take root in Russia.

Election Manipulation and Media Control

To maintain control, Putin's administration installed obstacles for opposition candidates, creating bureaucratic hurdles that favored his regime. The media, largely state-controlled, became a vehicle for government propaganda, effectively stifling dissent and limiting public access to alternative viewpoints. Election processes were manipulated to project a veneer of legitimacy, while genuine democratic practices were systematically undermined.

Public Response and Political Activism

In the face of declining democratic structures, opponents of the regime, such

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as Garry Kasparov, emerged to rally the public for reform. Despite his prominence as a chess grandmaster and activist, Kasparov encountered formidable challenges, including harassment from government authorities and suppression by the media. His attempts to mobilize citizens in regions affected by governmental failures were thwarted by intimidation tactics,

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Alex Walk

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chapter 9 Summary: RULE OF TERROR

Chapter Nine: Rule of Terror

On November 23, 2006, the shocking death of Alexander Litvinenko, a former officer of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), reverberated through global headlines. Poisoned with polonium, a rare radioactive substance, Litvinenko's demise in a London hospital highlighted his courageous stance against the corrupt practices of the Russian government, particularly during Vladimir Putin's rise to power as the head of the FSB.

Litvinenko had become a prominent whistle-blower, risking his life to expose grave misconduct within the Russian government. His investigations focused on significant events such as the 1999 apartment bombings in Moscow—a pivotal moment that incited public support for the second Chechen war—and the disastrous handling of terrorist crises, including the harrowing Moscow theater siege in 2002 and the tragic Beslan school crisis in 2004. The theater siege was marked by a botched response that resulted in the deaths of 129 hostages, fueled by misinformation and inadequate medical care following the use of incapacitating gas. Similarly, at Beslan, a chaotic military operation culminated in a catastrophic loss of life, leading many to suspect that the Russian government might have manipulated these tragedies to strengthen its grip on power.

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Litvinenko's activism resonated with others fighting against the oppressive regime, like journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who was assassinated in 2006 just weeks before his own death, suggesting a sinister pattern of targeted violence against dissenters in Russia.

As Litvinenko faced his last days, he grappled with the profound injustice of his poisoning, issuing a heartfelt message directed at Putin, condemning the state's brutal tactics against political opposition and demanding accountability. His subsequent death and the investigation that followed pointed towards individuals connected to the Russian state, underscoring a grim landscape of state-sponsored violence.

Litvinenko's tragic end symbolizes a dark chapter in contemporary Russian politics, where the boundary between state authority and acts of terror has become increasingly obscured. His story serves as a stark reminder of the dangers faced by those who dare to challenge the status quo in a regime marked by brutality and repression.

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chapter 10 Summary: INSATIABLE GREED

Chapter 10: Insatiable Greed

This chapter delves into the early presidency of Vladimir Putin, underscoring the dramatic changes he implemented in Russia and the global response—or lack thereof. By examining the complex interplay between domestic policies and international perceptions, this section reveals how Putin's consolidation of power shifted the political landscape dramatically, often under the radar of major global media.

The Election of 2003

In December 2003, Putin's United Russia party firmly established its dominance in parliamentary elections. The liberal and democratic parties were effectively marginalized, raising alarms about the state of democracy in the country. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) condemned the elections for their failure to adhere to democratic standards, yet major American media outlets painted a more optimistic picture of Russia's political evolution, reflecting a disconnect between local realities and international narratives.

Media Blindness

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During this era, American journalists largely overlooked the deepening autocracy in Russia as they focused on domestic issues and the repercussions of the dot-com bubble. This negligence was compounded by a general decline in foreign news coverage, even as foreign publications sounded warnings about the deteriorating state of democracy in Russia.

Putin's Foreign Relations

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, President George W. Bush fostered a close relationship with Putin, framing his crackdown in Chechnya as part of a broader global counter-terrorism effort. This narrative shift allowed many American journalists to perceive Russia not through its political developments but instead as a logistical ally in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Economic Policy and Key Figures

Putin's early administration recruited liberal economists to key economic positions, suggesting an earnest desire for reform and stability—contrasting sharply with the chaotic post-Soviet era. One prominent figure was Andrei Illarionov, who initially raised concerns about the Chechen conflict but later praised Putin's economic strategies, navigating the treacherous waters of Russian politics.

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Khodorkovsky and Emerging Capitalism

Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who initially epitomized the ambitious Russian oligarch, began to redefine his role by embracing social responsibility through his company, Yukos. He made significant investments in social programs, positioning himself as a progressive force within Uzbekistan's emerging capitalist framework.

Arrest and Suppression

Khodorkovsky's political activism and donations to various parties—including the Communist Party—ultimately led to his arrest in 2003, marking a critical assertion of Putin's control over the oligarchy. Accusations of tax evasion and fraud served as the official pretext for his detention, yet the operation underscored the repressive climate of Putin's regime.

Browder's Experience

Meanwhile, investor William Browder found himself disillusioned by the corruption that plagued the Russian market after initially viewing Putin's reforms as promising. His associate, Sergei Magnitsky, uncovered a massive embezzlement scheme linked to government officials. Tragically,

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Magnitsky's subsequent arrest and death in custody became a rallying point for a burgeoning movement advocating for justice and accountability in Russia.

Changing Media Narrative

As reports of Russia's regression into authoritarianism emerged, they stood in stark contrast to earlier narratives of democratic emergence. Former supporters of Putin, including aides and political figures, began to publicly distance themselves from his regime, reflecting a growing awareness of the serious implications of his governance.

Putin's Corruption

Allegations of extensive corruption surfaced, revealing a system designed to enrich a select few close to Putin, fundamentally undermining previous economic narratives of growth and potential. The chapter intimates that an insatiable greed motivated much of Putin's actions, blurring the lines between personal gain and state authority.

Conclusion

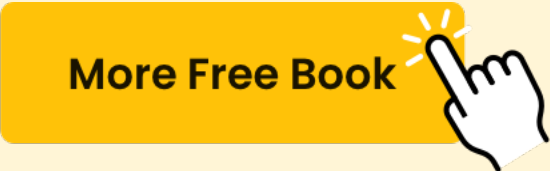
Putin's ascent was dramatically marked by a voracious appetite for power and wealth, reshaping individual freedoms and the overall economy in

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Russia. The systematic dismantling of democratic institutions alongside the proliferation of corruption illustrates the profound and negative impact of his reign on Russian society and governance.



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chapter 11 Summary: BACK TO THE USSR

Chapter 11 Summary: Back to the USSR

In this chapter, we revisit the complexities of the Russian political landscape as articulated by Boris Berezovsky during a meeting with the author on October 2, 2011. Berezovsky argued that the current regime, led by Vladimir Putin, was devoid of any ideological foundation and hinged entirely on the persona of one man. He asserted that discrediting Putin could precipitate the regime's collapse; however, the fragmented state of Russian society made the likelihood of widespread protests seem dim. This reflection draws parallels to historical trends observed in other authoritarian regimes, where the weakening of a singular powerful figure often catalyzed significant political shifts.

The chapter also elaborates on Putin's autocratic rule and his ability to manipulate elections to maintain a façade of democracy. His tenure saw a scripted transition to Dmitry Medvedev as president in 2008, a move intended to consolidate power while allowing Putin to operate behind the scenes as Prime Minister. Medvedev, although making appeals for reform to intellectual circles, remained ineffectual and was overshadowed by Putin's more aggressive approach to governance, which resonated with the broader population.

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Amidst this backdrop, the emergence of Alexey Navalny, an anti-corruption blogger, became a pivotal moment in the narrative. Navalny's exposure of systemic corruption resonated with an increasingly disillusioned public, and he quickly gained traction as a symbol of opposition, despite facing formidable barriers posed by the entrenched political order.

Adding to this complex milieu, billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov entered the political arena in May 2011, intending to lead a nominally opposition party into the parliamentary elections. Unlike previous oligarchs who steered clear of direct political engagement, Prokhorov's willingness to voice dissent garnered initial public interest. Yet, the Kremlin's grip on the political sphere was soon evident, as Prokhorov found himself sidelined and threatened, effectively stifling his aspirations for a more significant role in Russian politics.

The chapter culminates with Medvedev's announcement on September 24, 2011, endorsing Putin's return to the presidency—a move that unveiled their preordained arrangement and underscored the restoration of an authoritarian system reminiscent of the Soviet era. This strategic return not only solidified Putin's grip on power but also reinforced a political environment where dissent was increasingly quashed, contrasting sharply with the hopes for reform that had briefly flickered in the public consciousness.

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