

С. ОГОЛЬЦОВ

The Streamlined Banana



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18+

Сергей Огольцов

The Streamlined Banana

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—how about a model of global nutshouse under disguise of a literary critique?
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move it, hit it, beat it OK, fine, my regards to your fave talking head—they know
bestThanks for braking by!—Bon voyage!—Ta-ta!

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The Streamlined Banana: (An Experiment in Pure Literary Criticism)

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Annotation

“A book review three hundred pages long? Are you kidding? Go have your head checked and screwed back on the right way!”

Yoy! A brilliant idea, dear sirs and expensive ladies! And—just for hussle’s sake—how about a model of global nutthouse under disguise of a literary critique?

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Thanks for braking by!—Bon voyage!—Ta-ta!

Acknowledgment

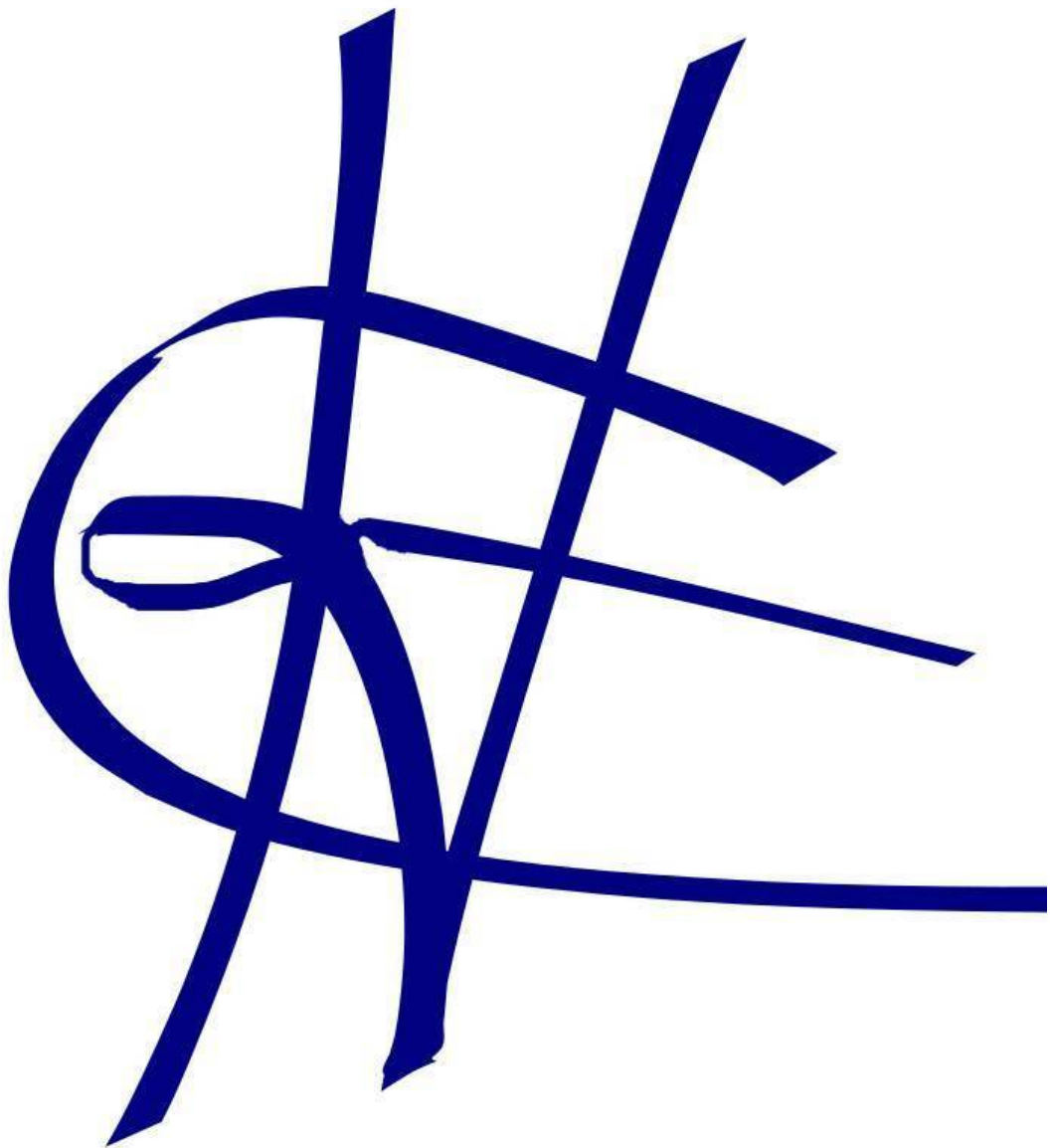
It’s a shame I’ll never have a chance to grab a beer with my partner—a handshake is out of the question, too. Yet, we’re a team despite a couple of ignorable drawbacks. My partner, aka co-author, aka friend, and me...

The most uphill toil is finding a friend who neither wants nor asks a thing from you.

Yep, you get it. It is about my soulmate, who doesn’t give a jack for fame, greenbacks, and... regardless... Because the essential buzz is in doing things, not in trading them for a reward.

Thanks to my partner, our book acquired impeccable punctuation, choicest vocabulary, and a big fucking style. I owe you one, co-author!

From the Outside, with love:



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Prologue

His elbow pressed a hefty stack of his side, draped in the gold-embroidered flank of a parade dress uniform. Barely restraining his hasty pace, he walked through the night darkness that already rubbed its impenetrable hide against the window panes from without. But there it was—the goal of his eager, excited gait—the door across the corridor.

An abrupt stop before it. His hand squeezed into a three-fingered pinch, jerking toward his tense forehead, but a twitch of his inky-black curls curbed the reflex. Instead, he stuck his middle finger out at the door, then slowly bent it and tapped the slightly jutting knuckle against the wood of the door wing. A sharp exhale, then a slow push letting him take a step inside the servants' quarters.

Mitrich, the senior valet, raised his unkempt head from its repose face-down on the forearms stacked in front of him upon a tabletop doodled with a multitude of haphazard scratches. He slowly crossed his muzzle, which swung open in a protracted yawn. The tiny flame above the tip of the wax candle—guttered down in its one-branch candelabra—flared up to give a ghostly welcome, yet changed its mind and sank back into a coma of extinction in listless weariness.

“Aha! Alexashka! Where'd you go? It's been a while since you've shown up.”

“Well, Ferapont Dmitrievich, if you please (grabbing in agitation the burden wedged up his armpit out into his both hands), I've been finishing this here trifle.”

“Aha! Alexashka! Where'd you go? It's been a while since you've shown up.”

“Well, Ferapont Dmitrievich, if you please,” he said, grabbing the burden wedged up his armpit out into both hands in agitation, “I've been finishing this here trifle.”

“Well, well, well... Dump it somewhere on the desk, out of the way... I won't make any promises. You know how it is—with us, everything proceeds in a strictly collegial way... Until the servants show up and pitch in their judgments, I won't hold out any long- or short-list hopes for you. But mind you take a few steps of your own. Call Akulina the cook to your chambers closer to nightfall to perk your bedding up,” he said, scratching his crotch, “you know.”

“She's old enough to be my nurse, Arina Rodionovna!”

“Even better! ‘Let's drink to our sorrows, nurse! Where's the mug?’ and so forth... the rest will just follow naturally. Do I really need to teach you the basics here? Also, don't skimp on tips for Vasyok the groom. Spare him some three or five kopecks for vodka, maybe a nickel. Above all, never forget to bow low to Nikandr the janitor. He absolutely loves that...”

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Explanatory Note

But the book's title is a total thumbs-up, right? Subtitled and all that big style. Some subtle sophistication is emanating from it, a certain unique flair. It stands out a mile away, like sanction-busting import substitutes from a sex shop.

The hint of bananas, too, triggers the average reader's imagination just right. Besides, streamlined things always push the subconscious in the right direction.

Yep, dear reader, you sure know how to uphold sound reasons. So be it! The title is left as is...

What's the book about? The question is astoundingly kiddish (*sic!*) It radiates a touching, pristine naivety—there are truly few left like you.

No wonder Rosstat is already preparing nature reserves for your kind, just to preserve so rare a breed, much like they do for precious fur-bearing animals. However, that's their problem and yours; meanwhile, I've actually come up with an answer to the question posed:

Like any other book, this one, of course, is all about one's beloved self. That's why the core components of the recipe include:

a) *An excursion*: A field trip to observe that specific layer of society adorned with a stamp on their foreheads reading, 'Successor to the Great Russian Literary Tradition'—a backdrop that allows the author to stand out far more advantageously against the fools;

b) *Thoughts*: On the basic question of existence: do I need it (and if so, in which way and to what extent)? Witnessing the self-liquidation of the human race?

This has nothing to do with the Special Military Operation—for the planet's billions, there are no irreplaceable millions. Go ahead and wipe yourselves out; they'll even thank you. Under the table, of course, bypassing sanctions.

No! This is about the sickle already flashing over the balls of the only argument FOR human existence—that any person might possess some creative capacity. Without it, everything just eats everything else, and that's it. Boring, when you watch it from a distance.

But what if we are already past our expiration date? A terrifying question mark in the steel curve of the sickle, raised over the hammer of creativity.

c) *Health metrics*: Monitoring changes in my mental balance. On the scale: “alert attention” — “disappointment” — “not giving an eff anymore.”

For those who are stuck in communication patterns propagated by the official TV mumbo-jumbo, and have difficulties with non-gobbledigookvized talk: here is your one last chance to get what this whole mess is about. I am appending a Review and Comeuppance for the purpose—right below this here recipe.

Gogoleva, Veronika:

*Review of Avdey Scumblower's book S*hole.*

“The novel is heavy indeed, and at times mercilessly cruel in its unvarnished historical truth. (1)

...The work consists of numerous short chapters (averaging 5—6 pages), which facilitates readability and allows the author to confidently pivot from one chronotope to another. At first, this structure may confuse and frustrate the reader, but over time it becomes an integral component not only of the book's rhythmic-temporal pacing, but of its very ideological core. (2)

...Avdey Scumblower has written at least one worthy book.' (3)”

Comeuppance

(1)

“Historical truth” is about as much of a fool's game as planting boundary markers between “normal” and “unnatural” sex;

(2)

“Chronotopic tempo-rhythmics” blended with chrome-plated rummy crumbs makes a great, low-cost remedy for a severe brain melt;

(3)

The Institute of Macromolecular Micro-Rubbers has created a special compound to coat absolutely anything. The tarp is marketed as a “*Worthy book*” brand.

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Yes, I admit, my response to Ms. Gogoleva wasn't exactly gentlemanly. However, it wasn't aimed at her personally, but at the idiots who ruined a beautiful woman with an idiotic education, forcing her to write reviews of hopeless garbage and pursue a career she won't have any use for in a hundred years.

She'll eventually figure this out for herself, of course—but it'll be too late, at the ripe age of 102.

Pushkin's fondest dream was to encounter at least a couple of women in all of Russia who possessed a truly irresistible pair of legs. Instead, the current education system ruins them—and their lower extremities—the way a sudden Epiphany frost blights lilies of the valley in mid-May.

And yet, she managed to give me one last warning—oh, even a review can't hide a beautiful woman's kind soul.

“Stay sharp,” she said, “watch out! This book is heavier than a steamroller—at times, it may turn as cruel as a teenage gang!”

Ah, Veronika! I would lay everything at your feet—yes, Mr. Pushkin, hers are actually worth it!—knee pads, elbow pads, not to mention my cuirass, if only I didn't already have the beautiful Dulcinea!

You can't fool her. "At it again, you old fart?" she'll snap, and I'll be forced to blush inside my helmet, with the visor down in this brutal summer heat. But still, thanks for the warning!

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Introduction

The habits of the critters in the protected reserve that has nailed a "Russian Literature" sign above its main gate are getting stranger by the day. This stirs alarm in those concerned.

And what about their bizarre posture at the sound of the word "banana"? Exactly! They freeze like a police dog statue, on just three legs with a front paw pulled up to the chest.

Like anyone with proper social views, I got dizzy over that damn banana. A plain banana, taped to a wall at both ends—for six million dollars! At a New York exhibition. A banana and two pieces of tape, that's it... And you, a useful citizen, just keep working your ass off like a regular Papa Carlo with no connections to the LA mafia.

How could any of us not freak out—anyone for whom "art" isn't an empty phrase, and for whom the word "dollar" is also sacred?

How do you hold back your grunting under the weight of eschatological gloom? That's it, guys, we've arrived! Termination station: the End of the World. Now there's nothing left to do but give up bananas. A lump gets caught in your throat at the mere thought of how many millions are sitting in there. Potentially.

In short—shock, goosebumps, nervous tics: every symptom present and accounted for. True, I didn't freeze like those pedigree hunting dog statues, but I was twitchy as hell for three whole days... Then it finally subsided, thanks to the next big sensation whose turn it was to blow up the online communities.

But that banana still strikes from around the corner in my brain from time to time—a sudden, occasional relapse—because art and literature are dear to me. This is the reason for the shift, both globally and within myself, toward questions of worldwide literary significance.

At first glance, the literary scene in Russia is vibrant and teeming: competitions, book fairs, panels, sales... There is movement!

It resembles the crowd that shuffled through the Mausoleum, year after year, decade after decade. The infinite loop engineered ages before software coding was even dreamed of... Past the coffin of glass with a mummy in a business suit.

Streams of drawn faces past the painted mask... For all we know, they're still shuffling around right now...

Naturally, the veterans who spent their lives surviving inside false-bottom boxes—having mastered the ropes of "state-commissioned literature"—have no trouble managing the gear. But what's it like for young talents caught in a trap of unfamiliar rakes?

To them, I donate my labor—a free philosopher's stone. Use "The Streamlined Banana" to instantly separate the golden grain from the glamorous chaff masquerading in a corporate mess-of-pottage tie.

Now all that's left is to decide—what do we apply it to? This tutorial uses a book (?) named S*hole (asterisks deployed to avoid the slightest chance of promoting the crap). The compiler, a certain Avdey Scumblower (any coincidence with real persons would utterly amaze me), was awarded the Big Book Prize—and the shit was reprinted that very same year.

In the top right corner of the cover sits a diamond-shaped icon: <18+>. It instantly makes the gourmets drool...

But don't give in to unbridled instincts. You won't find a single drop of real life across all 537 pages of this politically charged, highbrow bosh. The icon is a mere decoy for suckers, shamelessly slapped on by marketing geeks.

Yes, but why on earth do I need it? Excellent question! If anyone can figure it out, please let me know—I'm curious too.

2026-07-27

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Part One

1

“The theater begins with a staircase, and a book with a preface.” That was the subtly brilliant line I originally chose to kick off my review of this five-hundred-odd-page monstrosity.

After all, why not flaunt my elegantly aphoristic style? It’s not every day one gets the chance to cast oneself in such a flattering light. Fortunately, I managed to restrain the swelling impulse just in time.

Whoa, hold on, you rascal! Stanislavsky didn’t say a peep about a staircase in his famous quote; the wary cat kept it strictly to the cloakroom with its coat racks. Which, by the way, makes perfect sense if you compare the number of stairs to coat racks per theater on a national average.

However, taking such unprepared, off-the-cuff jumps without a safety net or proper fire support—to hell with all that elegance!—I decided, no leaping from the coat racks to the stairs and back.

Besides, the circus is doing just fine without me; its popularity is at an all-time high. Wherever you look, everyone is hustling, brazenly revved up, rushing to jack up their prices as high as possible. Selling oneself to the amazed public is rule one in the age of hectic monetization. Move it, move it, guys!

Deep down, he knows damn well he’s overcharging. He isn’t some big-shot counterculture icon yet, and frankly, nobody gives a flying rat’s ass about him. It’s just how marketing by the stab-in-the-dark method works.

Whoever disagrees that Hollywood and Netflix have, by their joint efforts, conditioned us to cherish the American Dream is pulling for a lost cause. We sympathize with brave go-getters who always find a way and get a happy ending.

In you, a vague conviction sprouts that you’re already in that land of triumphant individualism—the great USA. Some shady hooker, isn’t she? Having conquered her own backyard, she’s now barging into ours to teach us how to live.

Make sure you sling the gun at light speed, become the top dog in tomorrow’s shootout, and—boom!—you’re the new sheriff. Next thing you know, your spurs are drawing doodles on the governor’s desktop, and that’s it: go ahead and stake out a stable for your Cadillac on Capitol Hill. Easy peasy.

Just adjust the master plan to fit the local reality of your one-horse burg, and—go, go, go! Time is money, money is round—move it, fellas! Let’s monetize! Hose-lipped brides will be our prize!

Yet, my aphoristic staircase additionally banged its forehead against another, completely insurmountable barrier. (Any pack of theater snobs who remembered the whole coat-rack thing I could easily bark off—but this?!) The preface in S*hole was flat-out missing. Well, well, well... look who’s screwed.

Following a few sparse lines of publication data above a brief abstract detailing the full name of the citizen text-contractor and his list of merits on the literary front, you are immediately dunked into the text. The coat rack obviously didn’t fit the athletic spirit of the moment.

Feels weird, doesn’t it? Too bad, nobody’s asking your opinion. Welcome to globalization: fall in line or get crushed. You get a generic template with standardized limits, and you better get used to it. Intros and prefaces are deprecated...

And what else could the very first line of the very first chapter greet me with, if not numbers? Ha! Like they say—you can’t swim against the current. Just give in to the tide, lie back, and enjoy the views along the drift.

By the next paragraph, however, things look up. There, the purpose of the numbers is revealed—apparently, they are meant to help the reader realize that time moves in circles. So is its custom.

It is almost impossible to believe, but it's the cold truth: that damn array of numbers is repeated three separate times on the very first page of the work in question. Well, whatever—back in school, my teachers used to feed me much worse garbage than that on the blackboard. And Avdey has to fill those 537 goddamn pages with something, right?

Then he began playing the artist, translating time into physical anatomy by claiming some second hand was running within his chest to tickle his inner organs. Pretty intimate details for a start...

Well, I've been in the writing business long enough. I get it clearly: the second hand winding up his guts to start this S*hole conforms to Chekhov's rule: "If there's a gun fixed on the set in the first act, it has to fire in the last."

Oh, for crying out loud! Chekhov was lecturing about the theater, where the audience devours the whole thing in a single sitting. But in the dumpster fire of today? By the time you murk out your main character five hundred pages deep, the reader will have immigrated to a new country, gone through a divorce, and finished rehab...

And they're supposed to hold onto your petty mathematical breadcrumbs for that long? Give me a break. Switch on your reason once in a while—assuming you have that gear.

A writer's duty: make every page interesting. Each paragraph is a canvas in a traveling show... But who am I telling this to? You're already up to your neck in the slimy crap you craved.

Still, this had to be said: God willing, real writers will hearken—the ones who haven't been turned into desk-jockey paper-pushers...

Overall, chapter one troubled me with the crying mismatch between *the thing-in-itself* and its outer appearance. Usually, with a cover like that, you expect to find a book. Or was I asking for too much, too soon?

With undisguised automatism, Avdey was just working the assembly line routine: corner the reader, terrify them, catch them in the horror pincers, and go peddling sequels in small doses.

Sure thing, there's a choice of variants—you can bait the hook with cheap sentimentality, throw in some fantasy quirks, or... well, whatever works. Once hooked, the reader will happily chomp down on the whole comic book like a good little boy, drooling in anticipation: "Okay, so when do we get to the 18+ stuff?"...

But right now, the main engine and irresistible crowbar of the entertainment industry is raw fear.

Without dragging his feet or relying on slow thriller suspense, Avdey dumps a whole KamAZ truck bed of bone-chilling horror straight on us, instantly grabbing us by the windpipe.

(Veronika the radio operator sent us a warning—he got his orders from the Center: five to six pages a chapter. Stierlitz needs no codebreaking; he's long since trained to know that a single drop of initiative means trouble.)

Readers are naive critters—they see the word "I" and apply it all to themselves. Whose "I" in the crowd of us stays rock solid, not jumpy as their phone battery dies?

Then comes a worse horror: I'm in a foreign country, threatened with deportation to my native land. A storm is rolling in from Scandinavia. Besides, there's a beardless Orthodox priest who accommodates you in a haunted house. Yes, the blackout follows on cue. And your "I" doesn't know who will rat you out to the police first—the priest's wife or the Greek innkeeper. And to cap it off, the red wine is absolute swill...

That's a wasteful mix—it could fuel five or six TV shows. If you have the strength to survive this whole bouquet of fears in one sitting, your place isn't here. You belong on the barricades of the Paris Commune, or the unfinished—yet successfully delivered—tracks of the BAM railroad, you titan hero.

In short, yes—Mr. Scumblower knows how to wind the spring of his alarm clock, where the second hand ticks: five-six! Five-six! Five-six!

However, feeding Avdey nothing but sweets is bad pedagogy. At certain moments, we shouldn't spare the rod—that favorite spice from our traditional seasonings. Now, moving on to the flaws:

To call a Greek Odysseus and right then, back-to-back, Ulysses is the swagger of a teenager who thinks he's an encyclopedia like Wasserman. Everyone already knows they are a two-in-one deal on the run from Penelope. If you don't get it by now, you're hopeless.

As lost a case as that defrocked priest Okhlobystin, who slapped together a book and modestly titled it *Ulysses* just to cash in on a well-promoted brand name. His book also features clocks, by the way—an expensive Swiss piece in the opening passage, much like Avdey's alarm clock with the second hand that winds up his innards. Who stole the idea from whom to make their opening move not with the Queen of Spades, but with timepieces?

Yes, gentlemen hack-writers, right here. A cross-examination. Confess, motherfuckers!! And quit dodging, Vanyok! What is this nonsense about “the Mother Superior's orders”? Stop playing the fool with me! How do you bridge the gap between a country priest's wife and industrial espionage over stolen Rolex blueprints?!

As for the writing style: it's too familiar. It's the endless garbage tide that herds of bloggers chew on day in and day out.

Though I suppose it's a matter of taste—especially if you have none. To each his own. Modern consumers hate to strain themselves, so comic books hold all the cards.

The debut chapter is dubbed “Why Don't They Light the Fireplace?” Given the number of horror-darts pinning our protagonist to the wall, the title cries out for an extra word: “Bitches.”

Fortunately, the <18+> stamp on the sleeve serves a gag-order for the language police. But who are the real bitches in this scenario? The clean-shaven priest and his wife, operating a joint venture. Aha... Caution spells survival.

2

Treading water any longer is bad manners—this is Chapter Two, after all. It's high time to justify why our still-anonymous but indisputably main character got stranded in an obviously hostile foreign land. Frankly, it would be pretty indecent—allowing a random background extra to share intimate details about a clock hand tickling one's rib cage.

Now clearly arrived the moment to state how he popped up here—this “middle-aged mangy dude.” Don't take that quote-marked description for my own incivility—it's just a cheap text-manufacturer's attempt at looking self-ironical.

To top it all off, the guy is a professor. You can practically smell the worthless populism wafting off the page: a professor presented with the descriptive means traditionally reserved for a common joe.

In the last chapter, he was already bragging about his professor status to Ulysses-slash-Odysseus. Just to beg for a dishwasher job. He bitterly lamented the twists of woeful fate, squeezing tears out of the reader—O, my! A professor let reach this shameful level...

After that sobbing, am I supposed to believe he's one of the people? When he showed himself to be a condom patched in haste? No way. Let that rubber “I” go to its prototype—this Avdey guy. I'll withdraw to my own lot—not mangy in the literal sense of the word, but certainly worn out by the tides of my working-class career.

Next, he labels Ukraine “frenzied” because he had to “break through” it. No details besides. He's clearly posing as a Kovpak partisan.

On Czechia, his brush doesn't spare bleak monochrome tones. For starters, some sour police mugs rifle through his knapsack to seize a pack of cigarettes. Then, in a border town invaded by Roma tribes, he has to sprint away from a lolita—in her eighth month of pregnancy.

But he fled those criminal slums, saved by his rugged endurance... On the run, he spills quick squirts about his kayaking expeditions in the Kola Peninsula. Informs on wondrously convenient gear:

his backpack. Yep, Made in Israel. A casual bit of product placement—a timely bow toward the manufacturer!

And you begin to discern the well-schooled breeder who trained this here "I." The fella knows which way the wind is blowing—and exactly whom to address his curtsy to in unmistakable respect...

In short, this five-to-six-page section exposed a tangled, major-minorities Gordian knot. The text-feeder drops broad hints: "the worst is yet to come, oh-oh!"—as the Primadonna sang earlier in her career. Before she left us for that homeland—where a rapidly growing number of people unearth their roots.

The chapter wraps up with a cliffhanger—a hook designed to mesmerize the consumer. Let them keep chewing their popcorn just like they always do, but don't let 'em slip off.

Here, our text-mechanic has rigged the hook from the screeching brakes of a semi-truck behind the back of the mangy runaway. Oh my! Will the backpack absorb the hit? Or will a plaster cast become the hero's castle? Anyone made unsteady by the purposeful application of mass entertainment tools clicks for the next episode. They stuff another piece of chewing gum into their pie hole, or flip to the comic book whose hook they are on...

Instead of using regular chapter numbers, a title is slapped onto each five-to-six-page section. The second snippet gets one in Czech: "Pozor, pes." Avdey is fanning out his tail—the pride of a multilingual peacock.

In reality, these two Czech words read: "Caution, dog in the yard." But the text-compiler has stacked the deck. He deals a line much closer to the hearts of those who love hard-core jailhouse serials: "Filthy copper dogs!"

That's just how it stuck in his head since childhood. And he's too lazy to check. Either that, or Scumblower is taking a shot at hooking more audience into his camp perimeter.

3

No, the semi-truck from the previous episode didn't crush him. On the contrary, it delivered our fugitive from the chase by the pregnant Lolita and other juvenile hunters in the Gypsy slums—with all their street-cleaning drama. Why? Because sitting at the wheel was a kind soul. A man cut from the exact same spiritual cloth as that kind American trucker from Balabanov's cult movie *Brother-2*.

Overjoyed at how glibly he's rescued his professor, our laurel-wearing Scumblower spends his third five-to-six-page quota dumping a cheap road travelogue straight out of the old state TV archives. It reads exactly like someone mindlessly filming the highway shoulder on their phone. A cheesy voiceover host dropping well-chewed, "smart" observations from behind the camera.

Long ago, that show was hosted by Senkevich—Yuri, not Henryk. The man literally cut out his own appendix on a whaling ship where he served as doctor. The fear of an infection, aggravated by the total absence of another surgeon, made him set up a mirror in front of his stomach and slice it out with his own hands.

Later on, they stopped slaughtering whales with harpoon cannons, and he picked up a job with Soviet State TV. But all of that is ancient history. These days, marine mammals are exterminated by industrial waste and crude oil spillages. Dumped directly into their habitats. To say nothing of multi-mile fields—swirling, floating patches of polyethylene...

In the endless stream of Hollywood action flicks, this is the most generic cliché: the hero digs a bullet out of his own anatomy assets. Alone. Or assisted by some random hobo or convenient babe passing by. Naturally, the instrument of choice—a pair of rusty pliers.

But antiseptics in a hobo's shack are nothing like a ship's medical kit. If they splash an ounce of moonshine on your wound, you're a lucky guy. Want more? Go join the whalers—

Why do these little deviations land in my literary critique? The answer's given by that famous line from Gogol—"It's a boring world, gentlemen!"

The purpose of such injections is shaking off the clutch of bored yawns. Taking a hit of optimism, so to speak. Three full five-to-six-page sections are already behind us—and no writer has

deigned to hatch yet. From the outside, it looks like a perfectly normal book. You open it up—the text is there, the lines are all in neat little rows, but as for the author... Hello? Anybody home?

History repeats the Bubentsov case. Ever heard the name? Three. I swear! He earned three Stalin Prizes by grinding out novels about collective farms. At Novodevichy cemetery, his full-size black marble statue sits and keeps on writing. Eight days a week. In any weather conditions. But whoever I ask—nobody knows him. Faith! Google itself is clueless.

Unbelievable: rows of medals across the Sunday-best jacket's chest, a thrice prize winner, a marble meme—go grope whenever you feel like that, and still—Google doesn't know! You almost want to sit down and write a protest to Wikipedia...

But I don't pin much hope on them. They'll say three letters of our last names match. That I'm likely trying to push a relative. They are such a bunch of pedantic pricks over there!

All in all, little Avdey has a whole hell of a lot of words in his text. Five hundred and thirty-seven goddamn pages! To quote Prince Hamlet from the same-titled play—'Words... words... words... words...'

And what the fuck is the point? No—the question doesn't belong to the quote.

Sure, the words are there. But they spin out in a sterile thread. A style lifted directly from the bulletin boards of any random state institution.

Any facility will do! Wherever you go, three sections of this “book” have already been pinned up. They are words completely drained of vitality. Words pressurized to lose any meaningful texture—turned into two-dimensional origami.

But I don't blame citizen A. N. Scumblower in the slightest. It is his predetermined fate to drag the heavy chains of a martyr and a sufferer. While the true buzz of life is to live it to the fullest. Experiencing pure ecstasy...

Wait, wait! I owe you an apology—a couple of rather fishy words slipped out there. It would be far more accurate to put it so—

Happiness is the intoxication by obsession.

And it is not his fault that the simple, supreme joys of life don't stand a chance in a land of triumphant bureaucracy. A country where actual joy was phased out. Replaced by banking cards for the ever-loyal.

Happiness only comes in freedom and creative immersion. They are inseparable. Outside the strife and torments of creativity, you can't win freedom. Creating something is your weapon to break through to it. Only in the creation of unprecedented things and ideas—free from ready-made forms licked clean to the point of trash—can one find happiness.

But what do we actually find here, in the first three sections of the S*hole? It's derivative trash piled on top of derivative trash. Every single sentence is a dumping ground of two-dimensional, stillborn clones. Why is that? Once again—it couldn't be simpler:

The goals and the means are ass-backward. Instead of creating to win freedom—that's the real goal!—the prize-winner chained up his creativity to stop it from distracting him. He buckled into a slave yoke for the carrot of the 'Big Book Prize.' Then he assiduously began to stamp out some sheer garbage—a clear-cut marriage of convenience to a manufacturing defect.

Instead of creativity, we get a circus of sucking up to the “right people” on the prize committees. The networking starts. Curtsies. Bows. Bending over backwards this way and that. Diplomacy, they call it.

I'm not saying he goes completely on all fours. But any seasoned insider gets the message—respect has been demonstrated properly, his willingness to serve clearly signaled. He barks right on cue at the underground “zindans” in use by the Ukrainian Security Service. But it leaves you wondering. Hey, man—did I open a book? Or was it an accidental tuning into some state-sponsored talking head?

Simultaneously, a drive-by quotation from Tsvetaeva is inserted into the sequence—a calculated nod to the “internal emigration” community to prove he is part of the club. The corporate inventory of a bohemian intellectual must be verified, even if it requires only a dual-line entry. *See my aesthetic baggage?*

Creativity is a great cross. A heroic feat. A back-breaking labor taken on voluntarily. The clothesline in Yelabuga helped Marina end her torment. Especially when she had no strength left for her supreme obsession.

And what is this?—it’s the very thing you can’t keep under control.

“I walk and smile all by myself,

But once I stop to think:

What do I look like to the sidewalk fellows?—

I laugh until my pulse stops pumping!...”

These are lines by a Czech poet—also on the theme of uncontrollable happiness, by the way.

And looking back a couple of paragraphs, I see I was talking absolute hooey. No tether is strong enough to keep a creative knack in check: it’s mightier than you. And if by some miracle it was overcome... well... “Don’t sweat it, might happen to anyone”—the classic line by sympathetic hookers to comfort a confused client...

And now tell me, Avdey Scumblower—how many times while grinding out those first three sections did you burst out laughing? How many times did you reach a state of uncontrollable ecstasy?

Fine, whatever. You don’t have to answer. Andrei Voznesensky already answered for you, in just a couple of lines:

In our most crisis-free of all societies,

I have a production crisis—damn writing block...

Thank God he didn’t happen to drift into Yelabuga at that particular moment.

Am I profaning the greats? My dear fellow! You’re looking for profanation in all the wrong places. True profanation is right there. Where the name of the man who commanded us to “Live Not by Lies!” is used to cover up lie upon lie. Whoops, Isaich! Your name is stamped in golden letters now—right onto the assembly line of role models for future laurel-wearers.

I swear to God! Not a single one of my books will ever be submitted for any prize competition. Not even the smallest one—hell no! Just as Russia cannot be stuffed into a top hat, the creative act does not belong inside even the finest, gold-plated toilets of 99-karat proof...

And yet, sometimes it really gets tough. Your hands just drop. Yesterday, when I finished reading S*hole Section 3, I just sat there blankly in front of the window. Not seeing or caring what was outside. There I was. Eyelids hanging below wide-open eyes—like someone with shell shock.

Oh, God! What did I get myself into? Do I need it?

Only in the dead of night did the answer finally arrive. It shook me awake—pretty roughly, too—and said, “Hey, don’t sweat it, everything’s fine. Since you signed up for this gig, you’ve got to haul your Sisyphus load all the way to the final period.”

“At best,” it said, “you’ll make someone else stop and think about all this. At worst, you’ll be happy in those rare moments of pure, unadulterated freedom—when you do manage to break through to it.”

And that’s exactly how it is—just kicking a sick man and rubbing his nose in his own piles of shit is something I can’t stomach: it’s a total nightmare. But if I deliver a final verdict, wash my hands of him, retreat into myself, and just walk away—that feels completely soulless...

According to Berdyaev’s methodology, you have to do the exact opposite. You must break yourself open to encounter the other. For freedom is discovered only through the communion of “I” and “Thou.” So that it finally sinks in, once and for all—there’s no “I” nor “Thou,” but “We.” Otherwise, no feasible breakthrough to freedom.

Such as—?

Like by Father McKenzie, writing a sermon that no one will hear. I was still a boy, with absolutely no English, when The Beatles' genuine breakthrough in "Eleanor Rigby" completely blew my mind...

Enough philosophy—we have pages left to tear down. The savior trucker had Spanish plates. But our Nameless friend's attempts to gossip hit the wall of silence.

This lets Avdey click the channel to a popular political analyst. Selling his bla-bla-vomit on separatism. About Basques, Catalans...

Fortunately, a little motel popped up along the mountain road. After a night's sleep, the semi-truck was gone without a trace, driver and all—a literal *deus ex machina*. That's a bone tossed to my own personal erudition here. But Anatoly Wasserman would totally get and forgive me.

Next, Scumblower's creative "I" launches into a description of springtime awakening in the mountains of Slovakia. Where he is completely stranded, all because some guy named Yurik—who happens to be deaf in one ear—and a rich little brat named Petik, alias Pavlik, are ghosting his phone calls and frantic SMS texts.

In short, he spilled a bunch of hooks there to get a random catch. This Section 3 is titled: "*Where could I have gone wrong?*"

Avdey, we answered that for you a page ago. But let's repeat it anyway:

The mistake is that your talent—which absolutely anyone gets for life, unless they choke it out with the help of school education—was traded away. Traded for an expensive suit and a lentil-colored tie.

And just to complete my dutiful report: in Section 3, Avdey actually managed to cram in all three types of time. Cosmic, historical, and existential. It left me personally hanging on a hook. Well now—let's see, let's see...

4

"A thought once spoken is a lie..."

said a certain, not unknown, Russian poet. But I didn't repeat his line to show off, like, 'Look how educated I am!'—far from it. Of course he was in the school books, but it took me a lifetime to catch up to him. Now, by the right won through that long journey, I can afford to disagree with this famous quote:

But if I happen to be a principally un-muzzleable truth-teller, what am I supposed to do now? Go completely mute for the rest of my life, or what? Just so I don't have to confess at the very end: 'God, I spouted so much bullshit!'

Terminologically speaking, this question holds a paradox.

Neat word, isn't it? The way it sounds, just bounces off your teeth with some crunchy snap—*paradox!*

Mind you, the guy sitting next to me on the commuter train might not have a clue what I just crunched at him. And he'd be right, too, because we've got a perfectly good word of our own that you just understand right in your gut without any explanation—the *catch*.

Then again, without crunchily dropping a 'paradox'—jeez, look how much practice it took to make it roll off my tongue so casually: '*para-dox*'—no artistic elite group will let me into their fancy club. Especially not the literary critics. Though when you look at their mugs—same plain village bumpkins. Paradoxical, but a fact.

Anyway, that's not the point. I have a question for the great poet: why the biased view of my brainpower and morals? If I dare to say, 'I want a drink!', am I a liar again?

I suspect Citizen Tyutchev never bothered to open an email account. Guess I'll have to use my own homespun brain to figure it out. (Damn! Again?)

Telling people 'I'm thirsty' isn't a thought—it's just household info on the needs of the body I'm sitting in and using. So, talking about the flesh, I spout the pure truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Unless I'm boldly lying for profit, or just out of pure boredom.

But who is this 'I'?

Simple as a cooked turnip: I am three-in-one.

Part (a)—the personality, soul, and spirit, the 'real center' according to Berdyaev. (Yes, I got to know the philosopher personally. Didn't get most of it, but now I can brag that Nikolenka and I are buddies).

Part (b)—the specimen, the individual, or 'God's creature' in church cant.

And on the third side, (c)—the persona, the one who gets a passport, and the one they open a case file or a dossier on (depending on which state agency gets interested in you).

And so, in this manner...

H-hold on, what the hell was all that for?

Well, please, would you look at that! I went and split myself into three separate people, and now I've forgotten why? It's a good thing I didn't slide all the way into psychoanalysis—those Freudian bastards literally quarter people on their couches. Well, 'split' them into four identities, I mean.

Oh! I remember. Why is a spoken thought on a dry topic a lie?

Because it came out of a defective tool! The language of any specimen always limps.

While a thought sits inside you, it's pretty true. But drag it out with words, and it turns into a pervert. Like it or not, when you say it, you lie like a gray stallion. Your tongue just won't bend to describe how it looked when it was still inside.

Yes, the truth of the existential center—that very soul that got saddled with a life sentence inside your body—comes pretty close to the mark. However, the absolute truth has to be whole, and it has to happen all at once! But that's the catch: language is nothing but a tool for hacking the whole into pieces. You can be right a hundred times over to the power of x^3 , but while your truth is being mooded out piece by piece, it turns into the exact crime Citizen Prosecutor accused you of at the very beginning of the trial...

It's a small comfort that I'm not the only one; everyone around me—including Citizen Prosecutor, though let's keep that between us, you know the drill—is a liar, a fraud, and a bullshitter.

Fine, but if you are so hopelessly condemned to lie, at least do it beautifully. Especially when you're pulling a gig as a writer.

To smooth over the bitter sorrow that words can't capture the whole truth, I'll just go ahead and rip Chapter 4 to pieces. Let my inner soul relieve some stress that way. I don't smash glass or break furniture, no matter what action films say about fighting shock with crazy gestures...

The whole chapter is just a monologue by the Nameless Professor. He rants from bell to bell. His audience is exactly one person: Father Jiri, a priest who switched from Catholicism to Orthodoxy just to get a wife. This highlights the priest's clear erotic obsession, even if he doesn't have a beard. Who knows why.

Still, I won't rule out some future plot trick, since I haven't read past Chapter 4 yet. Maybe this academic lush from Moscow State University is in for some brutal trials later on in the storyline.

Maybe some Elon the Mars-Conqueror type will turn him into a sex slave, despite his mangy, molting appearance. In these eschatological times of ours, it's far too late to count out anything at all.'

The gist of his throne speech from someone else's armchair basically boils down to tales as dreary as a Russian coachman's song: about how absolutely gorgeous everything used to be back then, while now it's just a total, absolute disaster.'

Which is completely understandable—the guy is 49+ and molting. 'Back then' means the USSR, even though the only real difference is that they obliterated the 3 first letters and slapped an F after the remaining R, and turned the country into a cheap resource colony for bargain-basement liquidations. All the other crap remained exactly as it was.

George Orwell described the case in his *Animal Farm* ahead of time back in 1944—where pigs in neckties pretend to be civilized. The only thing he didn't mention was the Rolexes on their hooves: everything else is one-to-one match.

As for the artistic value of Chapter 4, it's a total, absolute 'uh... yeah...': Avdey let himself get dragged around by the nose by his own tool—language. And that tool, true to its nature, went ahead and hacked the whole thing to absolute sh... I mean, smashed it into tiny, microscopic smithereens. Forget about a whole paragraph; you'll wear yourself out trying to find a single sentence that hasn't been minced into empty verbal trash: 'words... words... words... words....

I get it, I really do—it's a new era, a different millennium, and you can't jump any higher than the trashy style of slimy blogging... But still—damn! In short, the jockey couldn't handle his half-broken nag; she bolted wherever she pleased, the rider got a sudden case of explosive diarrhea from sheer fright, and the end result: page quota number four.

To prevent any accusations of making baseless claims, I'll note that his attempt to terrify the reader with cheap, woodblock-print graphics of unprecedented meteorological storms tanked with a resounding crash. I won't hide it: the peaceful descriptions of nature in Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches* used to scare me way more—I would skip them entirely, jumping straight to the next paragraph. But during this trashy blog-writing about supranatural cataclysms, I had to yawn with a closed mouth just to keep up appearances.

In a nutshell, this sleeping-pill monologue is nothing but an oversized list of synonyms, aggressively peppered with punctuation. You can clearly see his desperate attempt to swap out the monotone lecturer for a young boy, but the kid never actually hatches out from under this forty-nine-plus Anonymous lush and his incoherent nonsense about ozone gas and vintage vacuum-tube radios

(An old tube radio! Did you think about the next generation? What is some Gen Z kid on TikTok supposed to picture from that word? Or is it all just about winning a prize, and after that, who cares? Is it just water off a duck's back to us? What a total waste!)

To answer the slippery question of why the USSR went belly up, he just turned on that same TV analyst to talk about our 'collective guilt' for giving up the fight for mankind's bright future. This talking head can't even see the three-story pyramid of bureaucrats sitting on every worker's neck. He's flesh of the pyramid blocks' flesh—no DNA test needed.

But enough about the grim stuff! It's time to move on to the sweetness of the dessert—those lovely little numbers and a full basket of different kinds of times! And it doesn't matter a damn bit that our prize-winner understands them about as well as a sheep understands sausage casings. Let him rattle off whatever garbage pops in the gibbosity of his head; we will step right over his ignorance, drop the correct accents, and fill our leisure time with some philosophical-temporal mind games.

First up, we are presented with a prime sample of historical time (of which our text-assembler himself hasn't got a clue, of course, in his naively virginal ignorance). The text, clunkily strumming along in the exact style of late-1930s Stalin Prize nominees writing about conquering the virgin lands, babbles on about transforming a swamp into a blossoming dacha cooperative garden. Attaboy, Avdeyka! What a stellar example of 'historical Δt ' you rolled out for us!

Right on its heels comes a sample of 'cosmic Δt '. Unlike the straight line of 'historical Δt ', this one moves in circles. And what's his grand illustration? A homeroom teacher forcing the class to walk in a circle, shut up, and count out exactly one minute in their heads without opening their eyes.

The teacher was completely right; a closed circle is the perfect symbol for 'cosmic Δt .' Meanwhile, 'historical Δt '—as any beginner philosopher has already guessed—is represented by a straight line. The experiment posed absolutely no threat to the students' health: they are, after all, the product of genetic selection, bred from generations who have spent their lives walking in circles, totally silent, with their eyes voluntarily squeezed shut.

And finally, the concluding dimension—existential time—is represented by a single, simple point. Why? Because 'existential Δt ' is not only discontinuous (unlike the first two timelines), but it is the absolute center of a raw breakthrough to freedom. Its location is dynamic—forget all that baby-talk about Harry Potter-style time portals—and you can never guess where the hell it's going to burst through next.

And now, right as the curtain drops on this latest 5-to-6-page quota, this detour into temporal dimensions brings back a specific memory. The most famous paragraph in world literature to open with a digital timestamp belongs to W. Somerset Maugham's *Lord Mountdrago*. In it, a psychoanalyst checks his watch while waiting for a late client: 17:40.

But look at our Scumblower! Attaboy! In the very first sentence of S*hole, he managed to outrun the decaying West by exactly one hour and ten minutes! 16:30!

Giddy up, you fast-flying little rusher of ours!

5

How this is done is completely unknown to me, and therefore I am on equal footing with absolutely anyone else in this matter. Totally. Yes, you're supposed to break yourself open and execute a sheer breakthrough to freedom, but how? A step-by-step instruction manual is completely missing from the picture—you can't even find one on the pirated websites. Not even a version for dummies.

The only thing you can do—if you get lucky—is stumble upon a finished result that proves such a breakthrough is actually possible, specifically for incorrigible Doubting Thomases like me. Take, for instance, Bach's Toccata in D minor, blasting through a pipe organ.

One thing is certain—without the know-how, the risk is sky-high. After all, you're not just stepping out of your comfort zone here; you're literally breaking and entering into the territory of total unreason, which everyone interprets in their own screwed way, and there's no telling how wrong it hits them when it crashes into their head.

You end up in such an unimaginable beyond that not a single honorary emergency-rescue stalker could ever haul you out. And if anyone starts waving their certificates around, bragging about what webinars they took on the subject, just spit (metaphorically!) and wipe the floor with the charlatan. Don't let him rob you with his empty chatter—your time is valuable, and you could trade that time for real money, on an occasion.

Even without knowing exactly 'how', logic says your main job as a creator is to avoid becoming like Christopher Marlowe (whom Shakespeare blatantly ripped off), or Leo Tolstoy (who ran a side-hustle as a graphomaniac on top of his count's income), or Uno Muno, and all the other icons who left muddy footprints and got caught in the lineup of world literature.

In short, leave the greats alone. Copying them won't give you the real high. You might get a career, cash, fame, and women—that's all possible. But as for the real high? Alas and oops.

It's not for nothing that a vigilant Ministry of Health didn't miss the chance to issue a warning on the matter: 'Once you get hooked on templates, you will sink into commonplace second-ratedness—get ready to bleed cash for antidepressants, followed by total addiction...' and so on and so forth (for details, see Wallace's *The Infinite Jest*, the bible of Jim Jarmusch, who directed *Dead Man* with Johnny Depp in the title role).

Yes, damn it! Walking untrodden paths is easy only for the Chinese. They've got thousands of hieroglyphs or more to work with. But with a measly thirty-three letters at your disposal, how much originality can you really squeeze out?

(Has anyone else noticed that after the victory of the October Revolution, when they slashed the Russian alphabet down from thirty-five letters to thirty-three, Russian literature effectively dropped out of the race on a global scale?)

And so, for a real breakthrough into the creation of freedom—you're expected to break free from the sticky chains of all clichés, which is exactly what's supposed to make you unique...

Too bad Chapter 5 is still sliding around in the rusted, worn-out tracks of a mind-numbing monologue. Self-repetition is just a cheap form of plagiarism anyway—a literal short circuit onto your own beloved ego. Even so, this latest 5-to-6-page quota almost became the single best chapter I've plowed through in this entire 'novel' so far... right up until the moment Professor Anonymous hit a new low and started begging the priest for vodka!

Now, I'm just curious to know—when they train these professors, do they pass a test on some moral code? Or do they have the exact same homeless-style pigsty over there as every low-level trade school on the State Statistics ledger? Then again, that's beside the point—we're all going to end up in the same place anyway. If it's not one addiction, it's another, or the flipside of them, but you can't outrun it either way.

Stylistically, this page quota beats as yet the rest present in the 'novel'. The sentences stopped looking like a concrete floor in a warehouse of tilted coarse grain sacks. The meaningless vocabulary dropped drastically. Why? Because Avdey started writing about his childhood.

The theme isn't new, but who cares? It's not about the *what*, it's about the *how*! The sentences became flexible and plastic. That's a huge plus.

Well, childhood is childhood. Swimming in open water, heading into the woods for mushrooms and berries. The reader starts casting comparative glances back at their own irretrievably sweet years, since those specific strings have been tugged. The older generation begins to recall the writer Krapivin from *Pioneer* magazine. Avdey completely failed to reach the bar set by Gaidar and Kaverin, but he tried as hard as he could.

Honestly, I just feel bad for Avdik. The kid had a rough childhood, totally fucked over by a lack of animals: no cats, no dogs, he never even touched a horse. Just some dead fish from a lake, and even those got ripped off by village bullies. Total lifelong trauma. Now he's made it to the rank of writer, and he writes while staring at those bastards with an unforgiving inner eye. Take that, you creeps!

The current 5-6 quota presents a year as two cosmic time loops of different sizes. The three-month dacha break is the big one—it's what let him survive the rest of the Soviet year. Basically, even as a kid, he hated the inhuman Soviet lifestyle and attacked it in his mind like a brave, totally vehement blogger.

You can clearly see his unconscious attempts to apply 'existential Δt '. And it makes sense—a childhood squeezed into a five-page quota inevitably shatters into isolated, pinpoint episodes that, unfortunately, have absolutely zero connection to one another. And this is what doomed his spontaneous punctualism to a total failure.

Yeah, Avdey never actually managed to break himself open; nobody ever trained him in those kinds of tricks, and he didn't have enough time to figure it out on his own—the deadlines for submitting the book to the award committee were breathing down his neck. Then again, there were his job duties.

It was exactly this buzzkilling approach ruined the high you expect when you crack open a book. But I don't hold a grudge, and I still managed to dig up the positive points in this 5-to-6-page quota. After all, we non-resisting non-believers are the absolute gold standard of impartiality.

He drops a few quick hints that 'nothing is right'. That rebel stance doesn't fit a kid's age at all—it's just a cheap blog trick to suck up to anarchists in the audience. Nice try, Avdey! Our people are traditionally fiercely loyal to the rulers, and right before an election, they are fiercely loaded.

Hashed up for the next plot cliffhanger, we get Petro-Pavlik again and his chief bodyguard Yurik, the half-deaf childhood buddy.

6

Hallelujah! Hip-hip, hooray! Well, finally! The hardest stage of tunneling through the upper layers of exposition on top of exposition on top of exposition is officially behind us—or as the pros call it, 'overburden stripping' done. Now comes a smooth, soft-and-cuddly immersion into the literary core, just the way we love and want it. Portraits of actual characters have finally begun to show up, physical features wrapping about the psychological make up.

For the patient man shall not be passed by the chalice he craved for so long, and now it is too late to take offense. (Will what's been poured make him happy? Well, that's anybody's guess. However, giving thought to all possible caveats can ruin the aphoristic punch of a line in toto—while it should seem carved by a stiletto. So sit right here in the parentheses and don't even twitch, inquisitive one.)

And finally, out floods a mix of everyone's fave Daniil Granin with a pinch of Kyr Bulychev. (Note jotted on my left cuff: 'Cheap lounge players everywhere worship that second guy's first name. For some reason they always use a lowercase letter—in labookh lingo, "kyr" means booze of any kind.')

He's launched right into short, high-density briefings on the past and future destinies of the characters in S*hole. It's like a dotted line, but done with real taste. Get the hell out of here, you loathsome blogging style! Give 'em hell, you fast-flying beauties! Clear the way! Clear the way!

These vividly painted portraits offered a ray of hope, if only because the female ones turned out much more attractive to our Scumblower than the men. Consequently, judging by his preferences (glory be to All-Merciful Providence!), our Scumblower is straight.

It's hard to relay what a relief this is. A mere thought of The Danish Girl makes my scrotum spontaneously twitch—wrapping it in a weird, hazy gloom and miserable prostration. And that's despite all my stubbornly cultivated tolerance.

Yes, this sixth page quota was a long-awaited oasis in the middle of a desert. Special thanks to Avdey for not overplaying his hand. While showing off the ancient words he managed to memorize, he controlled himself and didn't drop 'that is to say'—though he knows that card too, a hundred percent.

7

Inside any and every human being sits a personality—that's not even up for discussion. Let's say you absolutely despise your chief accountant for some reason: there's still a personality sitting inside him, regardless, just like in any and every one of us.

What's more, all these personalities are completely different, since they don't match up in the exact degree of how badly they've been brain-fucked by anxieties and internal fear. Nor do they match in the depth of their naive faith that the lot of pop stars and oligarchs is enviable—intensely so.

And what exactly *is* a personality? Why, it's that very same damn thing that's been explained to you, Mr. Professor, throughout this entire critique. But since you've been sitting way too long in your comfy armchair, let me remind you: a personality is what used to be called the soul or spirit in the old, naive days, that in the existentialism cant got transfigured into man's 'existential center'.

This is the only spare part in your whole setup capable of creativity. The rest of your biological components just handle bodily functions—and they'd better stay focused on that. Thanks to this wise design, any individual can make real breakthroughs to freedom, assuming they aren't an idiot.

Even people you wouldn't suspect in a million years. Including that chief accountant, even though he's a total brown-noser to the bosses, while acting like an absolute bastard and an unmitigated prick toward you.

However, to execute a creative act, the personality needs to focus its mind and bring itself into a state of total integrity. After that, the creative act will start rolling along like a charm.

The main thing is that the personality realizes this and stops wasting itself on trivialities, which buzz into all three of their ears, including the middle one—crap like 'order a pair of ripped-knee jeans from the internet and you'll find true happiness'.

Thanks to personalities being different we have the unique originality and authenticity of creative acts sitting in absolutely any and every one of us—at some of which the genius Kafka himself stares in amazement nervously puffing a cigarette butt he's chiseled off Rilke in a dark corner.

Alright, whoa there! I'm nobody's Father McKenzie from the Anglican breed of Christian Faith—so I'm gonna go right ahead and keep enjoying this seventh 5-to-6-page quota.

~ ~ ~

Like I just said: it's the same chair and the same priest. Being an ex-Catholic, he's trained to sit in a confession box until the client stops rambling. But honestly, this smooth text doesn't smell like rambling at all. It's built on the rock-solid guidelines of *Pioneer* magazine. And that's fine—leave well enough alone.

The characters already released onto the playing field are getting further development and extra personality traits. The riddle of Petik-Pavlik—which Avdey has been desperately overplaying for the last few 5-to-6-page quotas, tossing it this way and that—has finally been untangled.

As it turns out: Petik is his first name, and his last name is Pavlik! This gave our Scumblower the perfect chance to show off his sleight of hand during the shuffle: “Oh no you don’t—this here is Petik, and Pavlik is hiding right in the back-left pocket of your underwear!” Any magic trick only benefits from a little humorous seasoning.

Childhood Pavlik is drawn as a complete wimp who reads yellow *Children's Encyclopedia* books and believes in aliens. But Yurik looked like a beaver from day one—showing the early traits of a future cop and a slimy prick.

The wimp’s mom is a busty specimen: a woman whose sex appeal still makes old Avdey swallow hard today. She almost ripped off beaver-Yurik’s ear for tormenting her little kid—a kid already driven not quite right in his head by that yellow encyclopedia.

Flinging her 'sensual mouth' wide open, she showered the little beaver with a barrage of swear-word colloquialisms: a linguistic assault whose full meaning our future professor failed to grasp. And this, despite the fact that he was already at a quite mature, Pioneer-badge age.

From a literary angle, this 5-to-6-page quota is remarkable for belonging to two distinct movements at once: classicism, by right of seniority, and romanticism—which is classicism’s prodigal son.

A prime sample of the older movement is the visit made by the mom with her sensual mouth to another Yura: a teenager with a telescope. It was to his dacha that she dragged Petya for a makeshift psychotherapy session—where the telescope owner delivered a lecture to the kid on the ideal design and unmatched beauty of the starry cosmos.

And the romantic plot-twist was delivered by a thunderstorm: an event ripped straight from the finest examples of Japanese anime—and complemented by cross-hatching in the spirit of Gabriel García Márquez (translated from the Spanish).

Avdey wasn’t even afraid to label his eclectic mating of the movements an apocalypse: using a bolt of lightning to burn down the dacha owned by the beavers—the parents of our long-suffering Yurik Jr. It’s framed as a kind of revenge by aliens for his bullying Pavlik, who had found faith in them.

In passing, I’ll briefly note that any accusations of plagiarizing foreign authors are simply laughable. We aren’t reading Shakespeare here—we’re reading Samuil Marshak. We got luckier with T.S. Eliot’s poetry: there’s a choice of seven deeply agonizing versions in Russian. While instead of Joyce, we have... what’s his name again? Well, anyway...

Therefore, a creative hack is left with nothing but to soak up their spirit in the original and lay it out using the scraps they managed to get in the foreign work: it’s not for nothing that Nabokov called translations a transfiguration...

Regarding the hearing loss in one of Yurik Jr.’s ears due to the apocalyptic alien attack, our Scumblower keeps a stone-cold silence. However, I’m not complaining, and I’m not filing any justified grievances: little Avdeyka was shuffling and trying until he sweated bullets—so let him at least take a break from his plot rig.

8

Mount up, squadron! The kiddish games are over: out comes the score for the violin of time. The priest took the professor in—food and a bed in exchange for sweeping the church. Anonymous is happy.

I had to pay my own toll, too, to get busted out of the Detgiz prison zone: for this long-awaited transfer to the chemical-plant penal colony. Here I can finally say: 'Bye-bye, Mr. Bulychev and Lady Agnia Barto!' Now I’m a volunteer recruit!

What was the toll? The agony of returning to that exact same style of blogging: disparaging no one in sight, yet fearlessly merciless. Here, Avdey used broad strokes to sketch the big picture of

the rot we've all blundered into, generously sharing a blood-curdling filth that never became the 'true history'—the kind Ms. Gogoleva naively believes in—stuffed into high school textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education.

This eighth 5-to-6-page quota sits inside practically every single smartphone. It's exactly what slips through the feed in that specific corner of the neural network where you logged your account—scrolling through it at a flat speed of one smart-ass per half-second.

The only thing that somehow made my eye pause for a sec was a question from a Greek commentator—who also happens to own the local village tavern: 'Wait, but isn't it the USSR's now all back for you there?'

A piece of Greek wisdom: striking smash bang to the point without a miss. They simply went ahead and abolished the Central Committee of the Communist Party, swapping it right back out for the Good Old Tsar. Done out of sheer economic efficiency—a twenty-five-in-one bundle deal.

Hashed up for the plot cliffhanger, we get the now-entirely-habitual lamentations: the childhood friend who called him out, but never showed up to meet and accommodate.

9

The plotline moves further forward: along a sine wave. Replacing the Greek tavern-owner and his political lecture on the current moment of chaos in our best of all fallen worlds, we get a sudden leap backward—straight into memoirs about the beautiful years of college life.

The wimp pops up again—now playing the part of a philosophy student. Naturally, he knows more than any professor or the whole university department combined: a beautiful comic-book picture.

Throughout this ninth 5-to-6-page quota, Mitrofanov popped into my head: the tour guide from Dovlatov's *The Pushkin Hills*. And his visit literally pierced me with nostalgic tenderness—like the spear of St. George the Victorious skewering the accursed serpent.

And further on—in such a spear-pierced state—it suddenly occurred to me: why on earth is that? After all, both of these guys are writing about the exact same damn thing, right? Both Dovlatov, with his Mitrofanov, and our current laureate, with his Pavlik, have presented the same phenomenon: the stellar capacity of the human intellect to completely overturn any and all IQ metrics.

But you can feel a real, living human inside Mitrofanov. Pavlik is just a tracing-paper blueprint: a modified cyborg model built for AI black-ops. How did it turn out like that?

To me—still pierced by that damn spear (you prick, Georgie!)—it's clear: this wild difference in feelings is completely the writers' fault.

Dovlatov sees a personality in his character. This prize-chaser looks at his like a tool to line his own pockets—nothing more. A personality evokes real feelings; an objectified concept cannot. I don't care if you crown yourself with a whole forest of laurels: it's still a flat-out no..

The apocalypse, just so you know, Avdeyka, has already arrived—but they taught you completely wrong about what's what in it. It is not the end: the apocalypse is the beginning of a new life.

Our mission is to bring this beginning closer by any means. That's what we're doing, whether we realize it or not: everyone at their post. Who are we? Eschatologists, of course.

'The worse, the better.' You've heard it, Avdey. But did you get the wisdom, kid? It's simple: every lie and piece of garbage—no matter what fancy gloss they wrap it in like 'postmodernism' or 'conceptualism'—just speeds up the end for the packers. But for us, it's the start: for us eschatologists.

Don't look for this in Kant or Hegel. Start with Berdyaev—they never warped him by translation into Russian. Most of all, an author has to love their own character. You can't hide love any more than a cough. But a fake stands out worse than a needle in a sack—assuming the reader isn't just eating popcorn to kill time.

No, sir. Who's going to love an algebraic formula called 'the individual'—unless they're a total pervert?—(Look, just pull your damn spear out of me, you fucker!)—under whatever philosophical sauce they try to serve it.

Yes, they met at the university—but their paths flatly refused to cross. The future oligarch didn't notice the budding professor, and the professor hadn't yet guessed that the wimp was an upcoming oligarch.

And another thing—just thought of it right now—about that philosophy rule where quantity becomes quality, or vice versa. What a paradoxical trap: English literature only has twenty-six letters, yet Joyce, Pynchon—though only Gravity's Rainbow is worth a damn on Tom's ledger—and Wallace never let the living spring of real literature dry up.

Yet over here, with thirty-three letters, we're stuck in the hopeless swamp of the Sorokin-Pelevin stagnation: a frozen mediocrity turned out by a pair of old-fart masters.

And who the hell gave me the right! How dare I?! Judge for yourself, dear Professor. Here are two snippets from different sources. Same exact theme: a side view of two guys walking slow, talking philosophy. Compare them and guess which hemisphere Avdey was working in—A, Western, or B, Eastern?

1.

...hands in pockets, their figures dwindling—fawn and gray and a lick of scarlet, very sharp-edged—their footprints behind them a long freezing progress of exhausted stars, the overcast reflecting from the glazed beach nearly white.

2.

'Lost in their talk, the two thinkers ignored me: and I walked past them feeling sad and jealous...'

10

Everyone has a favorite number. Peter the Great, for example, had a soft spot for seventeen. For me—it's ten.

To be honest, I didn't know ten was my favorite at first: I had to calculate it numerologically. Once the math proved it was the absolute one for me, I called it quits. I'm a committed partner. Plus, I'm too lazy to go diving back into all those logs and cosines a second time.

And this tenth 5-to-6-page quota in S*hole didn't let down the expectations loaded onto it. Here is where you find a total, complete match between form and content. In terms of form—it's the same already familiar, gasping, frantic dotted line: '... I felt sadness and jealousy ...' Period. Paper can endure anything.

Prince Myshkin would have smeared each of those loaded nouns across eight pages. Minimum. But what can you expect from Myshkin? First off: he's an idiot. Second: he lived under the autocratic thumb of imperial Russia. We don't walk the same trails with his likes—such ones are completely out of step with our march.

And as for content, number ten is nothing but a student's brave thumping on his own ribcage out of sheer pride that the days of his rebellious youth happened to coincide with the start of the wild nineties. They filled him with ecstasy brimming over even three decades later: he is still choking on his own spit as he retells it—and thank God's mercy there isn't a glass tube shoved right through his cheek like a Pavlov's dog. Instead, a stream of teenage ego just bounces up and down a Czech priest's wife's chair.

While you're still a half-baked punk, it's practically unthinkable not to brag about getting it on with a whore who happens to be in grad school. At that moment, she was staging a campaign to raise her own retail price: which is why she put on a cheap, bohemian, Zinaida Gippius-style act from the days of the Russian Literary Renaissance. It was a marketing stunt—a promise to give herself away as a 'free bonus one' to whoever was able to score tickets to a 'cool' theater production.

A crafty little bimbo, huh? Raising her rating in the eyes of the consumer with an edgy bait-and-switch: a strategy based on conditions that were completely impossible to fulfill from the start. Like trying to spell out the word 'Baltika' from the tiny letters stamped inside every one-thousandth beer cap... A special offer for driving her to the moon...

Hey, it's not her fault she never slept with Marc Levy! How else could she learn she's not the first or the last? Back in Novel with Cocaine (1934), she was already beaten to it by some other bohemian trash: a woman trading her body for a government receipt attesting her client's donation of two kilos of gold to fight the Volga famine. Now *that* is what selfless bonking is!

It's a perfect one-to-one replica: a piece of paper here, a piece of paper there. Both for the exact same thing—a performance. Raising money to fight a starvation that you set up yourself! Total theater through and through.

But they didn't teach Ageyev in the lit department back then—not even as a sideline. Instead, his groin brain was standing at full mast, completely short-circuiting his actual head. So the kid went to Petik Pavlik to cry and beg for tickets you couldn't land in a lifetime: even if you stood in line for a solid month like a toy tin soldier.

But at that revolutionary moment, Petik had shaved his head bone-bald and laced up a pair of American army boots. He was already the overseer of wholesale black-market smuggling operations—with his headquarters stationed inside the 'Taiwan' beer pub. That's exactly where the desperate users of the Excel program running inside his skull kept rushing: for his internal macros to calculate whose goods to barter theirs for, and at what exact interest rate. Meanwhile, our grand thinker was being simultaneously protected by shadow thieves-in-law and the KGB—running in total sync.

He scored the tickets for his childhood buddy—but the artsy grad whore hated the play anyway. And the performance by the ticket-getter? Sneered at too.

This brings us straight to the temptation of power over man: a topic perfectly laid out in Nikolai Berdyaev's book, *Of the Slavery and Freedom of Man*.

Pavlik, like any other 'ruler', is nothing but a slave to his own slaves and a prisoner of his own insurmountable fears. Which absolutely coincides with the conclusion presented in a couple of books written by myself—to whom, and now, attention!—the name of Berdyaev was not even known at the time. If two men say the same thing independently of each other, no one beats another.

And it's a fact: the conclusion matched Berdyaev's almost word for word. What does that prove? What's meant to be will be. If our guy Popov doesn't invent the radio, some Italian dude named Marconi is going to do it instead.

Science knows plenty of double-shot discoveries. Just look at the Joule-Mariotte physics law—though don't bring that up around lit professors: let's be merciful toward the humanities crowd. Anyway, Petik is dealing the hands, the bald-headed mob boss. But thanks to philosophy, he knows a kingpin's status is a total illusion: you can't escape being a slave that way.

To sweeten his Damoclean pill, he wires cash to his mom with her sensual mouth, and his dad—Doctor Pavlik, that shorty with the washed-out eyes. He even grants a lifetime pension to the incorruptible communist woman who flunked him on his Dialectical Materialism exam: freeing him from college for good.

Which is exactly why he turned into the motherboard of the black market. He logs client data into his brain-database without a keyboard: the copy-paste is done straight through the ears on his head—shaven to a gloss.

He organizes charitable foundations for his failed alma mater, where instead of Scientific Communism, they now rot people's brains with the exact same kind of useless horse-shit—only this time with a fancy English accent. Out of equally groundless impulses: theater tickets to secure his childhood buddy's access to the grad-school whore's hole—with a bohemian rococo curl.

But this is just shameless determinism: the exact repulsive stuff Berdyaev hates. The childhood buddy, fresh off his handout for that grad-school donut hole, crawled right back to the pub. Drunk

on free beer, he started crying again: 'What are you doing, Petrushka? We're free now! It's the crazy 90s! Where are you steering the ship?'

The deadbeats with their brains screwed by the philology department don't know the first damn thing about determinism. For our top-tier slave, a step to the left or a step to the right is a concept just as unthinkable as the entirety of Dialectical Materialism—whether you swallow it in one big heap or take it in tiny, pre-measured portions.

And that's the 'hook' they applied to pull down the curtain on number ten. Now I can finally lay out all my real grievances against this so-called manufacturer of S*hole.

Yeah, 'so-called.' Don't get mad, Avdeyka: determinism is determinism! If you hadn't done it, some hack named Sandulnikov would have written this exact trash, word for word. The time had just come for this text-muck to hatch out. Then the phone rings: 'Alright, Sandulnikov, turn it in—we'll consider.'

That's exactly why you, and I, and we, and y'all, and they—anyone in our batch and all together—are 'so-called' treading our way under the exact same determinism: along our separate pre-destined tracks.

Now answer me this—do you honestly consider yourself a writer? You were dealt a spectacular, Dionysian ace right in your card-buy: the wild nineties! Even with your ragged, telegraphic scribbling, think of the massive historical strata you could have cracked open: in passing, on the fly—like a lacey openwork structure.

A great superpower gets scammed with vouchers. The people are brainwashed by the MMM pyramid scheme. Street punks are renamed 'organized crime.' The Colombian cartel is looking to buy a nuclear sub: opening up routes around the US Coast Guard. Sí, amigo!

The three emissaries from overseas were fucking stu... they barely recovered from the shock. You could literally fly a military helicopter from a base near Moscow straight to a secret helicopter plant: and all for a measly fifty bucks!

Striking while the iron was hot, they chartered the biggest plane on earth for a flight to Latin America: packing it full of helicopters. They only got popped right on the runway—some errand-boy general from state security ratted the deal out to the mob. So they hauled those overseas smugglers straight to a sit-down with federal-level thieves-in-law.

But right there, one of the go-betweens started playing them for fools: claiming that he himself was Escobar, in the flesh. Naturally, he scored instant respect and an immediate order for a sack of 'snow'—but he dug his heels in and declared: 'I don't even negotiate for anything less than half a ton.'

Long story short, the mob bosses give their go-ahead for the giant cargo plane to take off. The middlemen stayed behind for a while to take tourist photos at a naval base in the Kola Bay—posing with the captain right in front of a nuclear sub. Naturally, the fleet's high command approved it: just so the cartel bosses in Colombia would believe this wild streak of luck.

But the deal went completely belly-up. One of that notorious trio of go-betweens, while transporting the down payment—ten million greenbacks—went straight on the lam. They still haven't caught that Cuban son of a bitch: a man with his own private jet and a couple of backup yachts.

But a million IZh motorcycles still made it to South America anyway: sold at the price of cheap plastic scooters. Right behind the helicopters.

And instead of that—or anything remotely like it—you're seriously giving me the last name of the theater director where you supposedly dragged that artsy whore?!

Holy fucking cow! You're a champion of caution, Avdey!

11

I have a granddaughter of some kind... Though, perhaps, it's the other way around—a grandniece. I still have system glitches when it comes to rooting inside-family terminology: an insatiable bookworm named Eva.

She has read absolutely everything she could lay her hands on—both in the near and far abroad. Her mother has already thrown up her hands, abandoning her duty to supervise the child's reading list as required by parental control guidelines.

One day Eva sauntered up to me, too: 'Uncle Seryozha, give me something to read.' But what the hell am I supposed to give her? I'm pretty cleaned out in that department: a Chambers dictionary from the previous century and a couple of stray collections autographed by local-variety poets. But just try saying no to a girl who's half a head taller than you and of such beauty that... though wait, that's just the birthmark of family nepotism waking up inside me and fighting to grab the microphone...

Long story short, I gave her a little book: Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*. She brought it back in a week, saying: 'I don't get it.' What's to get? Same as a poet—just running it in prose.

So I dumped Roger Zelazny on her—the father of modern fantasy. Found his book in an empty minibus. Looked at a few pages and saw why Roger's baby was treated like a foundling bastard. I was raised to treat books as sacred: otherwise, I'd have tossed that premature freak...

I mean, think about it: he spends half the book walking up a mountain. Every page and a half, he fights off a horse or foot patrol, then recharges—meaning he stuffs his face, usually with wine and a smoke—and keeps tramping.

'Evusika,' I tell her, 'here is the absolute peak of fantasy production across all times and nations—however, on one condition: make sure I never have to look at it again...' Wait, what the hell was I talking about again?...

Oh, right! Eva's into the acoustic guitar now; she posts videos on YouTube of herself playing Spanish music, and she won't even look at books anymore. At least, that's what her mom told me. Say what you want, but there really *is* a magical power load inside these goddamn fantasies...

And yet, this eleventh 5-to-6-page quota actually managed to stir up some human sparks inside me—I even remembered Eva, even though among my relatives I go by the call-sign 'The Iceberg.' It's all thanks to the horse-shit written by our Scumblower: where that stray professor is huffing and puffing, dragging himself up a hill near a Czech village just so he can wash down some sandwiches with slivovitz plum brandy.

The Greek pub owner hooked him up with that booze for acts too nasty to list even with an 18+ warning. Also possibly, old Avdey just forgot what exactly Anonymous did to score that bottle. Or maybe the size of that 'service' just stuck out past the standard 5-to-6-page limit: who knows, there are plenty of options...

Beside the booze name, number eleven laid bare the modern trick for cranking out fiction. It's dead simple: you watch a metronome sway and type it out like a comic strip. Tick!—confessing to a priest. Tock!—backyard childhood. Tick!—the priest. Tock!—the dacha. Tick!—the Greek. Tock!—college days. Tick!—slivovitz.

Running things that way—one tick per page quota—he clicked his way straight to number eleven. That's where he proved to the Greek that our local blog-smearers are top-tier when it comes to political updates: their flair for comedy is frontier-free. He tells a joke about Brezhnev's grandson, whose idiot parents named him after his granddad. When he grew up, the cops beat the crap out of him at the station so he wouldn't treat the police like brainless fools. They asked him like civilized people: 'Who are you?' And he shoots back, smug as hell: 'I'm Leonid Brezhnev!'

But wow—what a cautious old cat! He didn't even drop a bearded joke without adding a disclaimer: an online check proved it's a lie. Now if Lyonya B. sues him, he's got an alibi—fighting defamation against an innocent kid.

Still, old Avdey has grown up stylistically. One of these days he'll finally hit the high bar: Youth magazine, vintage Soviet era.

For me, the USSR is still what it always was: four clumsy BLOCK letters swapped lately for 'sovok'. Giving trashy nicknames to the dead is just bad taste. That word 'sovok' is a quote from

S*hole—used by Avdey to build some street-cred when he was hunting for side-gigs in liberal circles—undercover.

But in the very next paragraph, our cautious little friend warns us that the word 'sovok' actually offends him, and that the USSR had plenty of things we can only dream of now... No, he didn't list the dreams: but he reeled in the veteran vote anyway. Slippery kid.

What else stands out about this political briefing to fill his page quota? The speaker's knack for picking at scabs while staying out of trouble. He drops a list of names of guys whacked in plane crashes, then goes completely radio silent—hey, maybe it really was just bad weather.

Then again, to fill a whole 5-to-6-page quota with chewing sandwiches isn't exactly stylish—even when you wash them down with slivovitz. Avdey was forced to keep cranking his hurdy-gurdy.

In this specific tick, Pavlik already weighs a whopping hundred and a half kilos; though diabetic, he still goes on to eat like there's no tomorrow. Now he treats the anonymous professor to a joyride jet flight: straight to the Yamal Peninsula—the taxi stand is based at Vnukovo-2.

Mid-flight, the oligarch finally rats out his childhood buddy. The name 'Slavik' pops out ripping the anonymous mask, and he's immediately prodding Slavik to go make up with Katya. This move—our heavyweight friend believes—will restore the holy glory of power. In his opinion, if Big Brother just says sorry to Ukraine, total world peace and happiness will be back for good.

"Give Crimea back to them?" Professor Slavik asked with a sarcastic smirk—and got an instant hit right in the gut by the weather conditions. The plane was being tossed around like a wood chip in a whirlpool. (A comparison concocted solely by the critic, mind you—and one for whose creative liberties Mr. Scumblower bears absolutely no legal, financial, or moral responsibility.)

Most of the crew crawls out of the cockpit. Goosebumps, full of sheer shock, go off to feel the flight attendant up—driving her crazy. The plane tries to land wing-first—classic Avdey's logic—gets thrown a hundred meters back up, and only lands safe on the second try. The stewardess' ghostly pale shows right through her makeup. Pavlik is grumpy.

Now, what? Anyone in the audience still clueless about the horrid follow-up to any attempt at repeating that stupid Black-Sea-peninsula jest at home? Hope you've smartened up.

Expertly aware of how these metronome page quotas work, I'll bet: in a couple of clicks, our little buzz-fly Katya will show up to tear Slavik away from that grad-school whore. Any takers on that bet?

12

Any seriously self-respecting thinker comes into contact with numerology—one way or another. This chalice did not pass me by either. I had to work hard on creating a personal numerology system. Well, what can I say? At least it turned out solid. And it still serves me to this day. Secretly. Otherwise, it would be way too risky. If the orthodox believers in official astrology and numerology ever caught a whiff of my DIY operations, they would have lynched me years ago.

The text-assembler of the product S*hole doesn't miss showing a passerby's interest in digits—alas, only at a primitive, circular-loop level, as previously noted. Yet for now, the topic isn't him, but my numerology: where "12" signifies a "nutshouse" in every astrological sense of the word. And this so-called "novel" immediately complies with the strictly digital prediction.

And no matter what—sheer naivety or flat-out stupidity—permeates the system of a man who doesn't know what the hell he's doing, he'll smash-bang fit right into the grid foreseen by my numerology for ganders of his ilk. I mean, where the hell else is he gonna go? Yes, Avdey went ahead and turned out quite a wild mix once again.

Chugging slivovitz straight from the bottle, the hero of his S*hole trudges down the hill—this time without any sandwiches: "The Polyane sat upon the hills, then they came down, and from that arose the Russian land..."

Everything follows the ancient, primitive loop. That's exactly what hills are for to a Slav—you climb up, you sit for a bit, and you trudge back down. And if anyone is offended by this conclusion, it simply means that their "innermost core" is better suited for structural engineering.

Obedient to the pattern—chugging Slovak vodka, leaving face-prints in the Czech mud of the Sudeten Mountains—Slavik was making his descent: in the finest traditions of Russian vacationing.

(These are the absolute ABCs of the writer's trade: first, you must thoroughly roll your character around in whatever muck happens to be handy—which triggers a reflexive empathy in the reader, to shift eventually into an instinct-level fondness.)

While at it, on he goes to rat Pavlik out—whose patronymic is Tarasovich (aha!), with roots stretching all the way back to Chersonesus (get it?). And that Petik Tarasovich is a case of total erectile dysfunction.

Well, he's not an outright eunuch with everything sliced radically off. Yet now it's painfully obvious to even a stray hedgehog that the future erotic charge of S*hole—18+ rating: the consumer's drooling in rightful anticipation!—has become a distinct load on solely Slavik's shoulders.

(The sympathies among the menopausal segment of the audience are now concentrating—and growing exponentially.)

To somehow justify his presence, Petik Tarasovich Pavlik hammered a crazy messianic idea into his head: global Slavic unification within one vast common Russian womb where everyone will fit. Based on preliminary math, anyway. Even the tech nerds who prefer engineering to history books. Absolutely everyone—as long as their family roots smell vaguely Slavic: Roger of the Irons, Chuck of the Polyane, or even guys from Montenegro. Anything goes.

The announcement date for this grand project is Anno Domini 2018—that's exactly where our former "Anonymous," now known as Slavik, is broadcasting from. A hell of a lot has changed over the past one and a half five-year plans, but our Scumblower still possesses those raw blogging instincts that are simply impossible to keep sane.

The hyper-patriots, of course, are practically tripping over themselves to show that our cause is just and that victory will be ours—exactly like in any other... Caution! If you call the consumer-co-op SMO a "war," you risk hitting nasty changes in your daily diet and lifestyle.

In a text assembled in year three of the war on chassis of a plot about a peaceful 2018, any hack drooling over a government prize-loaf is forced to show exactly who his chestnut horses are hoof-thumping and whinnying for.

To cheat the tricky timeline, Scumblower stitched patches with cryingly white thread. Careless? No way. He wanted everyone to see exactly whose line he's marching in.

"She'd better stay away from the bucha," Pavlik says—only a total idiot wouldn't see "Bucha" has a capital B here. Paired with his barked orders to run back under Mother Russia's wing, his hunt for the Big Book Award cash pot is completely exposed. Stark naked. Who cares that pan-Slavism is a dead corpse of brain-dead impotence? The state gets a new, prize-winning puppet speaker.

"Nationalism, which at its core is an erotic seduction, always feeds on lies and cannot do without them. A lie is already found in national conceit and arrogance, which is so ridiculous and stupid from the outside..."—so wrote Nikolai Berdyaev back in his day. And yet here we are: watching our literary text-assembler drool over those exact same ancient, state-funded lies just to secure a spot at the prize-trough. Some things never change.

Then erotic Slavik—Berdyaev says eros and nationalism are twins, meaning both can act with brains turned off, but that's enough quoting for now—messed up the suspension bounce on a police jeep parked on an empty dirt road. In the back seat, they were playing the "in-out" game straight out of Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*—guess that 18+ warning wasn't a lie after all!

Avdey's desperate attempts to write nature descriptions got dumped into this page-quota slush, too. Let's be fair: he strained as hard as he could. As the great humanist Mark Twain once said, let's "draw a curtain of charity" over the final result.

Though "the voluptuous moon" is a total goldmine. If he'd given it a "sensual mouth" slapped on Pavlik's mom, he'd have pocketed every single pervert in the book clubs.

Once back in the village—sloshed in full—the professor began harassing Father Jiri. His booze-dunked brain turned the clean-shaven priest into God Himself. Demanding the Almighty listen to his love drama, he rambled about Katya. Shouting for the All-Knowing to figure out if he scored with her on the first shot, the second shot, or how at all: "No tomorrows! Listen here, who do you think I'm talking to!"

Next rolled the inescapable after-the-second-mug Slavic egocentrism—with its pan smeared in abundant snot. Then he went ahead and smashed some goddamn glass or whatever to smithereens. Right on cue: the priest's wife trotted in in a plush bathrobe.

But Jiri is a total boss—clean-shaven or not, he showed her exactly who is god and king in a Czech household. She didn't even dare to peep.

Saint father sent Slavik upstairs to sleep it off. The guy blacked out until three. Then, he woke up to hear some hanged German dude stomping his heels on the attic floor.

What a killer cliffhanger! Like I said: where there's a 12, there's a guaranteed nutthouse—99 proof.

13

At first, it was total darkness and soaking wet—and the spirit hovered over the waters in the dark. Back then, storytellers had balls. They blasted whatever hit them straight out. Not anymore. Now we need an audience just to get high enough to make Great Art. We need a public like air, even if it's fake—sucked out of our own thumb or dug out from our own dirty kneecap.

Therefore, citizens of the court, I ask you to show mercy and leniency toward my client, Avdey. Yes, for several 5-to-6-page quotas in a row now—completely ignoring the reader—he has been babbling exclusively with Jiri. But who among us is without sin? This is just the kind of era we live in now... Every cricket walks a straight line, even on his own personal perch. They are seized by the terror that if you stumble in the wrong direction, one of two things awaits you: you either get bashed over the head, or you fail to get your prize check.

And is it easy? Just ask your own damn self. To balance on that fucking tightrope while every single one of your limbs is shaking—along with that "authority" you've grown around your bellybutton?

It was easy for Bulgakov to loudly declare: "Follow me, reader!"—without even bothering to ask, out of his naively trusting innocence, whether that reader had any ties to unchecked foreign-agent networks or maintained active exchange of SMS text messages with relocants evading the army draft. He just called out to any random person without a security clearance from the Organs. He wasn't scared of Godzilla cockroaches.

But my client was left with a pathetically meager choice: a priest in the quantity of exactly one piece. Furthermore, citizens of the jury, I ask you to take into consideration that he does not practice it in every single 5-to-6-page quota in a row. Rather, he strictly follows the rules of homeopathy—picking up this male-to-male connection at metronomically measured intervals.

To this we can also append a mitigating circumstance: a bottle of slivovitz plum brandy. Which was exactly what prompted the defendant Scumblower—alias Slavik, alias Avdey's alter ego—to turn the character named Jiri into a chronic symbol to substitute for the orthodox jargon of "God." Avdey acted in a hazy state of mind inflicted by an unaccustomed product. In everyday life he's modest, doesn't rename God into "Jiri," and sticks to plain old whiskey.

A stroke of luck, an unprecedented bonus fell into the lap of Avdey Scumblower—he found himself among the official witnesses to the volcanic explosion of Dionysian energy during the avalanche-like collapse of the Soviet Union. "Blessed is he who visited this world in its moments of fateful destiny..."—as the nineteenth-century Russian poet Tyutchev dryly observes.

And so, in this thirteenth 5-to-6-page quota, Scumblower releases his joker onto the field—a character with the call-sign "Slavik," a graduate of the philology department. But what exactly has this future laureate of the Big Book Award presented his reader with?

After all, people read books for a sole purpose: to re-experience personal emotions, to empathize with a character, and to compare their own live experience with the fate dealt to the protagonist by their inventor. So what exactly have readers been offered here? What the hell have they been treated to?

Ha! Bone appetite—here's the house special: a powdered wart on some university hag's face as she screams at a loser with a pathetic little beard. For the main course: that same thin-bearded jerk shouting with a mob marching down Tverskaya: "Down with the CPSU!"

This kitchen nightmare is served with a side of finely chopped half-allusions and half-hints from newspapers forty years old. Back when the TV endlessly drummed out names of political puppets. Names that not even retirees remember now.

Behold! This is what counts as literature today. Beautiful, mother-fucking prose! Just the fizzle of a sparkler tossed half-burnt into a glass of water to join the drowned bodies from the previous lines. Yeah, he sparkled within the limits of safe risk. But the August Coup, the tanks on Manezhnaya, the pipe barricades outside the White House? Fizzle—fizzle—fizzle! They might misinterpret it and shove it where the sun don't shine.

By the way, Rust—the guy Scumblower claims broke the USSR by landing a crop-duster on Red Square—later proved to be a petty creep with a massive ego. Working as a civilian orderly in a German hospital, he forced himself on a nurse because he was *The Mathias Rust*. He told her to check out the huge knife in his hand—right while that same "voluptuous" (!) moon was floating outside the window.

Don't mind that I'm a skinny, coughing geezer—my head works fine. I saw long ago that this is what the times demand. This cheap style is the best way to push clock hands forward. In a circle. The question of art has become a production-line question, dear comrades! Our factory workers are fully capable of finding deep enough solutions. Hooray, comrades! (Prolonged applause, turning into a standing ovation lasting at least 17 minutes.)

Berdyaev and the masses do not cross paths. Not because his books are missing—but because the school system has foolproof means to leave the minds of graduates with no tools to get him.

Mass microchipping is the surest way to secure society's sanity. Everyone should just do their job at their assigned assembly line. You a writer? Go crank out text—applying the methods beat into you by college mentors and webinars run by best-selling corporate hacks.

And mind you—it's best for crickets not to look for trouble off their perches. The small screws of the social machine—processing quantity into new quantity—should spin complying to the demands of business plans...

14

I'm afraid of leaving the impression that I've set out on trolling our prize-laureate... O-oh!... Exactly one single sentence has been given out, but what a huge bunch of lies and garbage spilled!

Start with "afraid": Lie Number One, born from the cheap clichés ever rolling out of brainless idiots eager to make a career of a writer. What, is Balzac the only one allowed? It's not like I'm ripping *The Wild Ass's Skin* off him. It's just a cheap pair of words: "afraid to imagine", "afraid to drop"—as if, what?

Oh, the greedy hunger of fresh-hatched, wide-mouthed baby birds! In fact, I'm not "afraid" or "wary" of—not even "sweat at"—the thought of leaving that impression.

The short time they've spent outside the eggshell keeps them from seeing the upside of growing old. Blinded by looks, they only notice the wheezing, the bald patches, and the fat. It's not given to them—not yet—to understand the deep satisfaction from not giving a fuck. The priceless gift handed to us by our matchless age.

Their ignorance is partly our bad: we don't rush to flash our not giving a fuck with the desperate vanity of upstarts.

I'm not afraid of jack shit. I just grabbed the first lazy phrase within arm's reach for my intro: 'I'm afraid that...' Dropped in in a rush, it serves a textbook lesson to see that the main source of lies lies in the brainless repetition of clunky templates.

Returning (God knows not by my own choice) to the problem of Avdey. He's monotonously dug in like a tick in a puppy's ear—feeding his standard colorless garbage to the same exact listener. You have to hand it to him: he's loyal to his victim. Jiri is living proof—Avdey has annoyed the hell out of him. Especially when he gets wasted on slivovitz and just rambles, drones, and nags, smearing snot all over his face. But let's be honest: how much choice does he have? Is there even an alternative?

I won't say the field is packed, but you can definitely find a few options outside of the goddesses, gods, and little godlings of his Greek pantheon. For instance, you could always address your very own creation: "I recollect that wondrous moment: before me you appeared, just like a fleeting vision, a genius of pure beauty."

Arrogant Pygmalionism, of course—indefensible. From the private journals of her contemporaries, this slut "A. P. K."... Long story short, I wouldn't have looked back at her a second time.

Appealing to future generations isn't banned either. Habitual, lawful occupation of the loyal layers bootlicking communism. The skills passed down to their modern successors. Yep, still licking today. Sure, the target shifted slightly—and now it comes wrapped in St. George ribbons—but it's done with the same enthusiasm, deep and selfless: to reach mutual satisfaction.

Ultimately, you can't rule out addressing yourself—personally. But handling this trick requires extreme caution: you risk pushing your luck straight into a split personality.

(For more details, see the work by S. Ogoltsoff—*Russian Prose at the Turn of the 2nd and 3rd Millennia (A Dotted Literary Overview 1983—2023: Sorokin—Dovlatov—Salnikov)*. Google will tell you where it's located.)

The hitman hired to execute the contract for S*hole chose Jiri as his confidant. Well, so was his choice—the heart wants what it wants (and let Jiri be his judge). But before you think anything bad about me, you should sit down and think it through: why the hell would I even bother to troll this deadbeat? What is there for me to be envious of—his prize money or his writing style?

wouldn't take this guy's writing style if you paid me. As for that prize check, it's quite a few decades too late anyway—I'd welcome it with my obscene finger up. I mean, what the hell do I need it for? An extra pair of jeans? Mine are still sturdy. Yet for that nothing, you have to bow low, act a platypus with an unnaturally wide smile and cheek pouches full of excess joy—just to secure a stable position of a screw in an eternal scam... Save your troubles—nope.

That's why the tiniest suspicion of trolling stays groundless, baseless, and brainless. And if it happens that I have to keep little Avdeyka in check here and there, or give his nose a fillip or two, it's purely an educational reflex. Since you happened to be there at the moment of exasperation—here, get it, you little puggle—for the splendor and total misery of courtesans who style themselves to look like the Russian literary elite of the current moment.

As for me personally—what the hell do I need this S*hole for anyway?

On this point, it's all incredibly simple—by a sheer whim of Chance, this tempting snack of gingerbread happened under my idle claws. And as a regular old graphomaniac, I don't need much to fill my share of eternity... Let us continue, however.

Nikolai Berdyaev never actually stepped away from the term "existentialism." He docilely used it in forms that had already turned habitual: "existential philosophy," "existential center," "existential time," and the like.

But the great merit of this philosopher—still unsurpassed in Russian—lies in the fact that he raised the question of the necessity of purging science of terms inaccessible to those who think "existentially." A chance to completely bypass traditional rote. The Glad Tidings for the likes of me!

Terminology distillation is a fairly labor-intensive process. It is met at daggers by the wunderkinds who can rattle off any piece of absolute garbage from memory, even when in a coma—all while unable to dig the matter. They drum it out so fast it literally swerves your head. A trick far beyond my capabilities. So, to give myself a clue as to what I'm talking about, I had to distill "existentialism"—and the equally quirky "existentiality"—down to a much more clear form, easily pronounced: "essentiality."

Essentiality is simple: learning what's what through a person's live experience while they exist.

Now I get it with zero mental strain: why "essential center" means the soul-spirit-persona, and why "essential time" makes way more sense than "existential time." Sure, it's not 100% crystal clear—yet decreased obscurity perks you up, inspires a solid motivation...

Coming back to the current 5-to-6-page quota number fourteen, we see so-called "Slavik" at the age of twenty-one. University is in the rearview mirror. He's professing his love to his alma mater, harbors dreams of running away to the Kuril Islands—and hitting the open road, in general.

However, his thoughts don't flutter around the treetops for long—he lands flat on his routine, prosaic ass. Taking a job as a junior editor, alias proofreader, within the city-limits grid. The fire he opens at the four-year-old "dry law" leaves you clueless—the Soviet people long since have broken in the rigorous regulations. No-alcohol tea-party weddings with moonshine poured out of a kettle any different from those of lawless times? Are you kidding?

Then a girl walks up to him with that classic line of theirs: "Remember me?" The game of "What, Where, When, and Wearing What" followed—which he loses by a mile. Out of pity, she finally drops a code word in Spanish, spelled out in Russian letters. Slavik's brain explodes. First, she's hot—he's twenty-one, remember—and to top it off, she's from Crimea!"

The magic impact loaded into the word "Crimea" was demonstrated already twenty years later—by that near-crash landing on the Yamal Peninsula.

How's that for a killer cliffhanger? It definitely hooked some folks, mostly because—back in the day—it was a Crimea girl who forced my virginity.

Though I don't find fault with Crimea. Moreover, that wild girl's present address is in northern Italy. One of my granddaughters dug it up after doing some excavations online. But here's a real essential catch: we hooked up with the internet long before those kids—but they're still slicker with it. Some weird paradox.

15

A sudden spleen wave went over me. A certain weariness sat down in my very bones. The moment I wrapped my head around the fact that this is merely 5-to-6-page quota number fifteen—and what a hell of a lot of this damn product is dumped ahead of me...

And as a final blow, Vladimir Dahl sneers out from his four volumes of the Great Russian Language: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak, eh? Right, you old fart? Don't contract pulling the cart if you haven't stuffed enough oats under your belt!" And other barely looked-through entries in his Dictionary.

Holy hell—four fat volumes! I'm an old man, not a tractor. My overall mood, honestly, is in sync with a mountain climber's. The one who stopped at the foot of a peak, staring up with his jaw on the floor, thinking to himself: "Man! Aren't we completely fucked!"

Though maybe he doesn't think at all—given he got free, regime-provided education. In that scenario, his feet do the thinking: "But who needs it? Are we contracted for climbing this SOB's Kilimanjaro? Grunt-hauling Avdey's trash in our backpack—as the grand symbol of modern Russian literature!"

But the guy bossing the show from under a faded baseball cap at a meter seventy-four above just waves his hand and orders: "Let's roll!"—what a motherfucking prick!

And it hit me, bone-tired from this insane work: no way will my sarcasm or angry lines last for this entire Big-Ass Book. We need a mid-march pivot. I should shift my priorities. I don't have the juice for this whole mountain of shit—and sooner or later I'd slide into self-repetition. I hate that idea. It doesn't put a smile on my face. It makes me sick. In short—I pass.

So it's time to feed the manufacturer some gingerbread—if he actually deserves it anywhere. Though I know beforehand the whip won't stay idling for long: Avdey's bound to spin out of control again. Spare the rod, spoil the child. So what exactly am I supposed to praise the kid for?

Well, here's one: he gave a pretty informative look at the ultimate dream of Soviet youth—getting dropped into the young-animal pen for budding high-ranking executive bureaucrats. Cadres decide everything at any point in a bureaucratic state's history. You have to forge them young. Under the guise of camp counselors and translators for foreign kids in sunny Artek—right on the Crimean coast at the foot of Mount Ayu-Dag.

The future helmsmen of the great superpower were treated to three meals a day—served whenever they felt like eating. After lights out, collective naked sea baths followed, concluded with subsequent copulation. No, not a group thing: just a modest whoever-managed-to-grab-whom, on the separately located benches of the sleeping pioneer camp.

Now it is absolutely clear to me who shares pics of the heartfelt propaganda on Facebook: how sweet was happiness to live in the USSR. (Oh, yes! And not to forget slapping the mandatory note here: RF legislation has declared Meta—Facebook's parent company—an extremist organization.)

The squad under Slavik consisted of exactly three pieces—all of them Peruvian guerrillas from the Shining Path. Two kids and a dude fully ripe: genitally. He wanted Dasha, a translator for the Yugoslavian pioneers.

Slavik lusted after that very girl—in secret. But Dasha jumped the Peruvian instead, even though the guy had killer bad breath. Her only motive for these late-night hookups with the Latino was pure sadism toward Slavik. He had to do simultaneous translation from Spanish—all while his dream girl and the smelly guerrilla chose a camp bench to mate on.

That way, the readiness for self-sacrifice was implanted and steeled in the Soviet cadres. Early training—just to stake out their pass to a shining future.

Whether Slavik watched the progress of the bench-staged action from the bushes, Avdey does not specify. But S*hole will clearly become a bedside bible for teenage jerks—right before they go to sleep.

We must also praise comrade Scumblower for a simple fact. The declaration delivered through his protagonist—"We didn't steal Crimea from Ukraine"—was not concluded, despite the author's Moscow registration, with the traditional: "That's been and shall be our baseline!"

The final curtain-drop cliffhanger for this 5-to-6-page quota was catered by the sobs of a fat twelve-year-old girl on a bench—underneath the shimmering of maritime stars in the night sky.

16

"A thought once spoken is a lie!" So said the great one. In a flash of poetic vision, he stood at his wooden desk—steel nib dipped into the inkwell—and repeated it out loud to the hooked-out ink drop.

He wanted it to understand exactly what it was to map out on a plain, logoless sheet. Or rather, he didn't repeat it—he dictated it with a slow drawl, like a schoolteacher. Even though he called himself a poet.

A poet's job is to crush mountains of hot air down into something so compact that even ink can get it. Say a poet sits through a ninety-minute lecture by some hyped philosophy professor. Then he goes home, and dumps the whole summary onto blank paper in a single line: "A thought once spoken is a lie!" Now go ahead and try condensing an hour and a half any shorter. Especially while standing up as you scribble.

These days, comfortably rubbing my nose against the monitor, my finger stained with no ink, I'm just tap-tapping the springy plastic of a keyboard. I'm spelling out the dots over the "i's" left out of his compact line.

Because times change drastically fast. What people used to get on the fly now takes a while to sink in—if it hits at all. Thanks to the insane progress all around. Don't touch the brakes—on we progress!

Okay, out of sheer love for humanity, I will add some fluidity to the thoughts spilled across the treetops of my comment. A thought is a lie? Ha! As if it actually has a choice! After all, you ultimately construct it out of words. And every single word is merely a sign—a symbol abstracted from real truth by a distance of three times nine lands.

There is a distance of infinite proportions between that tattoo of yours reading "I♥iphone!" and the actual depth of your feelings for that \$600 bitten apple.

Most philosophers just stack verbal-symbolic lie upon lie upon lie inside the houses of cards of their academic systems. The sole reason they build them? To watch the spectacular collapse of their own dear, faulty logic.

To make it clear: take the tiny word "I." Because it's so completely abstract, it can cover any random object you want—from a 300-pound sumo wrestler to a toddler in daycare.

Out of pure love for humanity, I won't even go so far as to suggest trying to imagine the true meaning of just one single concluding word in that widely known line: "I think, therefore—I exist."

Yes, but where the hell is the truth then?

And the truth, my dear man, is in the exact same litter of objectivizing jargon as "God," "money," "homeland," and suchlike.

You can memorize them by heart, any single one. But you can never truly get it—if not through your own live, personal experience, forged in the throes and trials of the "I."

Welcome to the lifelong quest, if you please, to get it through essentiality. Through the violent breakthroughs of the creator's essential center toward absolute freedom. As simple as that.

However, inside Scumblower's sixteenth 5-to-6-page quota, Slavik didn't bother to bust his balls in search of the truth. The explosion at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant is accounted for by our fat little girl.

Firstly: Snowball the cat tried to commit suicide three days before the disaster, repeatedly launching himself headfirst at the apartment walls.

Also: a cop in Fastov stood by while rocks were thrown at the bus of evacuees from Pripjat. And how they chopped off her hair so it wouldn't radiate. Now she's stuck on a bench in Artek—treated like a leper by the pioneers.

But where are the rest of the kids from her bus? Take your pick:

1. Not everyone's dad is a high-ranking cadre;
2. Little Avdey prosaically slapped together this piece of crap into S*hole from scraps of hearsay.

The truth of this admittedly tear-jerking story remains beyond verification. (Stones, or just a single stone in a fully asphalted city like Fastov? Did they fly out from a raging crowd, or from some random little punk who's shitted his pants from terrifying, bizarre rumors? Did that cat actually sense the atomic explosion in advance, or was the animal simply suffering from severe constipation?)

From my own live experience, I only know the wind blew east and dragged Chernobyl's radiation all the way to clotheslines in Scotland. But the Geiger counters clicked on time—and the local housewives dumped the wash.

Also, that crane operator V. Gavkalov was sent from construction unit SMP-615 in Konotop with his rig to the "accident" site—the mandatory code word for the explosion used by the state news show Vremya.

Also, how the traffic cops forcibly pumped alcohol into KamAZ drivers hauling concrete to bury the crater under the lid of the “Sarcophagus”—good old “Commissar's rations,” if anyone remembers.

They slapped a warning sign right on the dump truck windshields: “Caution! Driver is drunk!” Blasted out of their minds or shaking from fear—not a few drivers just drove the concrete to a handy patch of woods and dumped it in the dirt.

Also, how booze keeps leukemia at bay: proven by the live history of Chernobyl fire chief L. Telyatnikov. He showed up to the disaster totally wasted, right from a massive wedding—hey, it was Saturday. Eleven years later, he hit the British Isles and found a warm welcome and total mutual understanding: especially among the Scots. He finished his career—and his life—as a Major General at fifty-five.

But Slavik babbles this tragic fat-girl story to Father Jiri and his “church-mom” Anna. Not that she gave birth to him—their setup is like by Kupriyanov and Natasha. The girl preferred to turn a tree instead of a pikeperch.

On the Futurist scene, Vvedensky is way deeper than Kharms—but Kharms is trendier. He picked a catchy handle, and his face alone would have blown even battle-hardened TikTok selfie avatars straight to hell.

However, dumping this information into a Czech environment through the pipeline of “little girl-to-Scumblower-to-Slavik” instantly triggers a chain of completely different associations—entirely unrelated to the OBERIU avant-garde.

Those rocks hurled at the bus from the crowd will instantly remind them of Kristallnacht: the glass-shattering night of Jewish pogroms across Germany, Austria, and the Sudetenland in November 1938—back when the police did absolutely nothing to intervene for two whole days.

Cropping off her hair will make them recall the literal tons of long hair harvested from those arriving at the “death factories” of the Third Reich.

In a side note: the poetic streak in the Germans’ national character is open-source data in the public domain—take “Crystal Night” or “The Night of the Long Knives.” Though instead of knives, Hitler actually liquidated the “old guard” of German fascism with guns: specifically in the hands of his “new guard.”

The news of that poetic night of June 30, 1934, immensely delighted comrade Stalin—he never tired of repeating to his inner circle: “Wow! What a great job Hitler did!”

This delightful example was instantly seized upon, and after the assassination of S. Kirov on December 1, 1934, the Soviet people composed a popular ditty: “Stalin whacked old Kirov dead in a narrow corner”—right before heading out in multi-million-strong prison stages to drop dead in the crackling Siberian frost of the GULAG camps. Those who got lucky were lined up before firing squads—with relatives notified they were held “without the right to correspondence.”

Their German counterparts were honester: the families of the executed paid bills for the ammunition used for the cleansing of society.

It would seem like everyone is one of our own—all are brother Slavs: Czechs, Russians, Ukrainians—yet the goddamn associations are out of sync.

No, Mr. Scumblower didn't care a bean for the details of the civilian evacuation from the nuclear explosion zone. He showed even less interest toward comparing the “incident” to the atomic bomb blast that Marshal Zhukov detonated during military maneuvers in the Orenburg region in the 1950s—just to test out on our brave, handsome little soldier-boys what kind of crazy shit this really was. In any case, the main street of Orenburg still bears the Marshal's name to this very day.

And since Chernobyl—the literal child of the USSR's atomic program—happens to be located on the territory of Ukraine, she must be punished: just in case, so that fascism never dare raise its head from out there. These very considerations smartly justified the SMO started in 2022.

Our prize-laureate can only hint at it indirectly, since his “worthy” product is locked into the good old year of 2018. The only inconvenience then was that green toad of envy choking us ever since that badass American operation: “Desert Storm” back in 1991.

I mean, look at how easily that Chuck Horner cracked old Saddam Hussein open like a nut—are we supposed to be any worse than them?

We have a brilliant minister of defense, after all—the sheer glare of the medals pinned to his full dress will completely eclipse his colleagues from North Korea and China combined. Mount up! Full ahead!

Then the old story from the times of the Crimean (sic!) War of 1854 repeated itself:

“On paper, plans looked just fine—

which made the troops march to a ravine!”

The Russian autocratic empire got a kick in the teeth in Crimea then—a humiliation no less degrading than the one handed to Russian communist imperialism in Afghanistan (1979—1989).

No, the careful Mr. Scumblower didn't zoom in on the facts—the smart award-winner saw that position was a losing bet. To wind up the page quota, Avdey served a delicious list of Slavik's girl's looks: a solid inventory list. What do you expect from a bureaucratic lapdog cadre?

Georgi Markov was made Chairman of the Soviet Writers Union—but today, not a single recycling plant will take his worthy works even as cheap waste paper.

17

After tucking the twins and her oldest grandson in for bed, our shared Baba Marfa would kill the nursery light and go stand by her bunk in the corner. She'd freeze there like a black shadow against the streetlights from the common courtyard—her face tilted up, whispering secrets to the ceiling in the thick dark of that corner. That's where her God lived.

So my later shots at understanding the abstract garbage of “God” didn't start from scratch. I knew His exact night coordinates: God hangs out near a vague whisper in the dark.

But the old lady dropped the ball on sex ed—big time. It's a bill I had to pay over and over again later in life: in my sex life, obviously.

Those fucking Russian fairy tales she used to read to us at bedtime—man, I wish I had been plugging my ears! Yes, those exact “wonder-tales” became the number-one reason for all my subsequent sexual agonies. They planted inside me an absolutely lame set of views on how you're actually supposed to approach... well... THAT.

Thanks to those tales, for a partner to unlock my full carnal warehouse, she had to conquer me first. Only then would I bust my ass—plowing like a horse that just ripped off its leather coat. Or rather, I used to plow: past tense. With the current state of my lower back's skeletal frame... well, let's not go there. Main thing: I'm not totally bald as yet.

All those stoves sitting in open fields, those rivers with marshmallow banks—like a pack of horny tour guides, they completely ruined my settings: “First you taste my little pie, then I'll tell you where the geese-swans flew!” Demanding that crap from me at five years old, when I didn't even have a clue about the whole cunnilingus thing!

That's exactly where my groundless, excessive, over-inflated expectations sprout from: “Firstly—conquer me!”

Why the long-winded intro? Because we just hit Section seventeen—the most boring section yet in this sickly miscarriage of a text, stuffed tight into the full-dress uniform of a “mature work and a worthy book.”

Section seventeen covers Slavik's first night with Katya—you know: given someone out there is still capable of recollecting what THAT's actually about.

The question of erotica—putting a hand on one's loins—is worked out with a pathetic, crying insufficiency not only in Russian, but in global literary practice as well. Wherever you turn, they present you a choice from exactly three things:

— Poeticized garbage based on that ancient Greek myth about apple halves snapping back together and leaking sperm and egg fluids—it looks less like romance and more like camels humping.

— Visual porn props of soul-crushing boredom: essentially a medical atlas of genitalia for first-year gynecology students.

— A sleepy accounting ledger swiped—with church approval—right out of a breeding manual for a commercial cattle farm.

I'm not offering any ratings or recommendations regarding the Kama Sutra—it remains a complete blind spot for me: I was too lazy to hunt down a pirated PDF of it on torrent sites.

At the same time, considering the industries where Eastern civilizations lead the field, that Kama stuff seems like a first-rate stimulation when you take to developing robotics models.

Given the global, universal fiasco in the realm of written erotica, there was absolutely no reason to expect anything worthwhile from Avdey Scumblower in this direction—and he completely justified that lack of trust.

The five-to-six-page quota of Section Seventeen is jammed with a drag-out itinerary of a walking route across the Soviet capital: there's definitely a tour guide hiding inside this cadre.

Finally, the hero hauls his prize on the last commuter train to the family dacha. There, by his own honest confession, he starts an “introductory,” “fleshless” sexual connection—right after eating canned goods from the root cellar and greens from the garden. The connection, though, was a success. Supposedly... Like any regular dry humping.

Waking up alone the next morning, the protagonist dashes out in his underwear. He finds her in the garden, wearing his plaid shirt. This gives him a note of hope that his internship on the grad student paid off. Maybe...

Katya keeps laughing in a lively chat with Slavik's uncle, while weeding a garden bed with her bare fingers. In a sudden splash of tenderness—strictly within his own self—Slavik instantly labels her a “khokhlushka” slur.

The dangling of that cheap, sentimental cliffhanger marks the end of the page quota.

[Note] A tragic misunderstanding has taken place with the term “khokhol.” In one of my old comments on Facebook, the devil prompted me to note: “I am a khokhol.”

Whoosh! In exactly 2 minutes and 31 seconds, Facebook notified me that for allowing myself such linguistic liberties, I would be booted from the community with no right to restore my account—the slightest mention of Facebook is banned under RF law, unless you explicitly state that FB is part of a terrorist-extremist organization.

Explaining the total clash between mine and the organization's cultural roots back to the anonymous Facebook—remember, mentioning FB is illegal under RF law unless you say it's a terrorist organization—is a losing battle.

They'll never get that a “khokhol” is just the lock of hair on a shaven Zaporozhian Cossack's head—see how lovingly it's painted by Ilya Repin in his “The Zaporozhian Cossacks Write a Letter to the Turkish Sultan.” And I am absolutely not an instigator of ethnic hatred...

Anyone can call me a khokhol—I'll just swell with pride. The most bitter, devastating insult I ever took in my whole life—and my bio has been packed with crazy lexical events—came from the word “boletus” mushroom: I swear on my mom! But on Facebook—and mentioning FB is banned by RF law unless you say it's a terrorist organization—they'll never blacklist that word. The mushroom hunters obviously have a killer lobby among extremists.

And in conclusion—here is a quotation that is entirely beyond critique: after something like this, a person has no choice but to change his name, flee into exile, and begin his life entirely from a clean slate.

Look at how beautifully he pinned himself to the wall! You wouldn't wish this on your worst enemy:

““Yes, church-mom... back in those days, winning a girl's love wasn't so simple... Back then, girls still had concepts of honor...” — (Avdey Scumblower, S*hole, AST Publishing House, Moscow, p. 103)

18

Fact is, literature only has two actual movements: classicism and romanticism. The constant breeding brood of fake styles only multiplies because crooked critics are running out of brains. Who the hell are you trying to scam with your “suprematism” and “impressionism”? Put it back where you swiped it, street thief—that belongs to a completely different field of art.

Nope. They won't even blush. And yet they could have learned a thing or two about honesty from common pharmacists: of all people.

“Symbolism” = classicism: 66%, romanticism: 34%.

“Modernism” = classicism: 54%, romanticism: 46%.

“Conceptualism” = classicism: 0%, romanticism: 0%—a full cistern of a sewage vacuum truck: 100%.

To act like cutting-edge critics, these hacks just phonetically copy English words into Cyrillic. They pull such ugly faces with their texts—God take mercy on us! It's a game to see whose mutant buzzword can cut a Russian ear deeper or blind a reader with swamp-witch ugliness: *Gospody pomilooy!*

And they get a paycheck for it—for cacophony, caco-vision, and a total caco-flooding of the brain. Is there any real benefit from them for society? Not a fuck'n'jot!

[Note: A “fuck'n'jot” or “fuck'n'jota” was a unit of weight utilized by ancient Egyptian pharmacologists. Later on, apothecary manners grew noticeably coarse—and the ancients transitioned to conducting their weigh-ins using Etruscan shekels.]

The necessity has long been ripe to bring them to their senses and—if they can't manage to switch to numbers and percentages on their own then, my dear Avdey, I at least tried to show them the way—to transfer literary criticism onto healthy, digital rails of easily digestible understandability. Can't handle basic arithmetic? Then draw your visual examples straight from living nature. For example...

Take common poodles. They get shaved for summer, jacketed for winter, hooked to a leash, and—let's go, Zhuzhu! The happy little dog pulls the leash, lifts its leg here and there, and trots along. That's it. Sleep tight, citizen critics! Now you don't need to break your brains over the “immanent implicitness of chronotopism.”

The basics of dog training show that S*hole is just cobbled together in the style of dotted poodle-ism—and I shouldn't have panicked the blogger crowd with early suspicions anyway. To you, Scumblower is as distant as strained cranberry juice to Red Bull.

What are the trademarks of poodle-ism? The desperate urge to mark as many objects as possible on your walk: the Yamal Peninsula—leak! A rocket star over Tselinograd—leak-leak!

Sometimes he marks multiple objects light-years apart in a single line, spraying it out like a fan. The whole grand plan is to fake an all-encompassing scope, making the dumped content look endless. He's desperate to give off a faint whiff of an epic saga—just like those massive Pyotr Proskurin novels they used to print in the old *Roman-Gazeta* broadsheet brochures.

In page-quota eighteen, Slavik suddenly decides to lift his leg on theology. He takes it in his mouth and just chews on it forever—obsessively mouthing that cigarette he smoked as a rebellious teenager over the Gospel of Matthew.

I mean, sure, it's a sin—but not a huge one, right? What's the corporate fee for that, Father Jiri? At the same time, he starts marking all kinds of biblical parables—leak-leak-leak!—in the Scripture, wherever his brain imagined a fishy thing.

~ ~ ~

And when God made every living thing—which Slavik and Avdey know for a fact from their classes on Scientific Atheism—He told Adam to run a property inventory. They used a basic phonetic setup: the animals walked up to the census desk one by one, and he slapped labels on them—verbal stickers. “You’re a tiger. You’re a jeroboam. You’re a silkworm...”

And that is exactly where the unutterable wisdom of the Creator revealed itself—He gave us a firsthand view on the absolute limits of human suitability. The human race was told in plain text: “Your only purpose is to create nothing but pure illusion.”

Names are merely signs: symbols of things. Names are a total abstraction in which the living essence is violently transformed into a cold object—and this objectivization leads the sons of Adam further and further away from the essential truth.

Objectivization is an illusion—a total fraud. And no matter how many abstract ideas Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel cooked up—like the “thing-in-itself,” the “thing-under-itself,” or the “thing-outside-of-itself”—they will not bring you a single inch closer to the truth. An idea, like every other concept, is a completely illusory object: even if it is the idea of communism or of undying love for the Mother-Homeland.

So take comfort, Slavik—that little cigarette you smoked over the Holy Scripture with such sheer terror was by no means a sin. “Sin” is merely one of many cheap rattles tucked inside the knapsack of political analysts—otherwise known as shepherds.

It is a completely hollow illusion engineered solely for manipulating the human herd—alias the masses, alias the people. The idea of sin is beloved by churchmen every bit as much as the slogan: “Submit to Caesar what is Caesar’s...”

And the bureaucrats are completely for it, tooth and nail. First, you give to Caesar—alias the State—either in hard cash or as cannon fodder, it doesn’t matter: the bureaucrats will dictate exactly which one it ought to be. And only then, you are completely free to think about God—provided you still possess a thing to think with. I mean, did the State waste its funds on your free education for nothing?

The circle has closed. Exactly how many seconds are in it, Professor, according to your cosmic time? If any more parables bug you, just call the law offices of “Theodicy & Doomsday”: they’re experts at cooking up legal excuses for God whenever people start hitting Him with lawsuits.

They find plenty of loopholes using abstract junk like sin and cold hearts. First, He carves a rule in stone: “Don’t kill.” Then He wipes two whole cities of creatures made in His own image and likeness with a midnight bombing run—talk about a sin.

A sin? Man, you are thick, Slavik! Sin doesn’t exist—it’s nothing but the concept of a leash and a collar. And since you forced me to say it out loud, my thought is now spoken: and therefore, it’s already a non-truth. You get what a total prick you are?

And returning to Christ, whom you peed on today—did He have apostles? How many of them? Attaboy! Turns out you aren’t completely mangy after all!

However, we only have 4 Gospels—where are the missing 8? Where is the Gospel of Judas, for instance?

Oh, really? So eight guys on Jesus’s crew were illiterate, and He’s busting his ass from dawn till dusk like a day-laborer while the line never ends: blind folks, cripples, epileptics, noseless syphilitics, amputees, and dead guys He has to resurrect.

And mind you, You’ve gotta lay hands on all of them. No cosmic clock has enough hours to beat basic literacy into the heads of those eight homeboys of His. Even Judas, the supply guy for their vagrant gang, had to run the whole accounting book in his head. Supposedly.

Yeah, right... like the Church Fathers had no hand in vanishing eight chunks of the New Testament. And you were actually sticking up for those girls in the parable who didn’t save their lamp oil—you could use that oil right now to grease your gears and fix your brains. Maybe.

Tell me something else: what nationality were the apostles? Duh, it happened once upon a time in Judea—so all twelve were Judeans. Now, out of the four Gospels that cleared censorship, how many are in the Judean language?

Zero, Slavik. A big fat zero, you little data-nerd. Every single approved “original” text is in Greek. Wrap your head around that: even in the Bible, those crafty sons of Odysseus managed to stick their noses in. The Church Fathers never sleep—they’re always looking out for Caesar’s business, even when the church is legally separated from the State.

But enough of the sad stuff, let’s get back to the literature we all love. Try to remember, Mr. Scumblower, a line from Ilya Ilf’s notebooks: “Tangling in his own snot, a boy walked in...”

Oh, wait. Did they only give you a quick summary of Daniil Kharms’s notebooks during some generic lecture on Futurism? Figures.

Instead of a real cliffhanger, the content-collector just dumped a list of questions for himself at the end of number eighteen. He didn’t even attempt to answer a single one of them. Hmm, whatever... Maybe Avdey isn’t a total lost cause after all...

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Nah, Scumblower, there’s no point in being mad at you. You can’t help it. What else is there to expect from a highly successful product of the system? A system that pampered and coddled you—all for its own greasy needs.?

Frankly: if I had the chance, I’d gladly give a “fondling” session to your ears. Just as an after-school elective.

And the guy has the balls to bitch about how basic Katya’s poetry is—yeah, I’m switching lanes to Slavik now. He had a golden chance to carve his own Galatea. But what came out from under the chisel of this Pi... if you’ll excuse the word... gmalion? A card-carrying Komsomol chick. Bright red headscarf. Cropped hair. Completely brainwashed by dreams of dying for the good of mankind.

Nah, you can’t help it. That’s just how they formatted your hard drive. Then they let you climb the ladder like a loyal little cadre—straight to a gig where you get a fat bonus. Not some basic quarterly payout, mind you: the kind of special bonus meant to officially certify your status as a bulletproof corporate bureaucrat.

“Chiefs! I propose giving Gimpy Hoopoe another feather—a big, hugely big one—for his headdress. That lets him beat the Nobel-ized Vegetarian squaw from the next reservation by three enormous feathers! Howgh, I’m done!”

“Passed unanimously! Limp on over, Hoopoe. Toss that cheap wreath aside—let’s stick this achievement right in...”

So instead of Galatea, you get Komsomol Katya. A woman showing every biological sign of a female praying mantis running her own birth control program. Before she flings her legs up, she calculates the exact day count from her last period.

Boom! It finally clicked—where this award-chaser got his sick obsession with numbers. “Is she going to give me today or not?” That’s the exact schedule that house-trained the poor guy.

A limping, bloated amount of space in this chapter is wasted on hook-and-line fishing. Apparently, he was inspired by the group photo on his desk. The one showing the dual-ruler pairing equipped with imported fishing rods—all in a private VIP reserve on the Angara River. Naturally, on the wall behind him, just to the right of his bureaucratic nape, hangs a massive portrait of the Current One. Total compliance: just like any other cadre who sucked up enough to get a personal office corner.

Slavik crawls off his sweetheart and slithers over to his favorite uncle in this never-ending marathon of confessions. Alyosha is a drunk, but a neat freak. His house has a single-slope roof with a specific angle...

Avdey—Slavik’s operator—is dealing a game of solitaire for church-mom Anna. He pulls his cards, one by one: faded snapshots from a family album whose expiration date ran out decades ago.

“Oh, and look at Uncle Alyosha's wife—a total bitch, but a looker. Kind of Polish, right?”

Yeah, whatever. We already demonstrated the fan-spraying habits of Avdey's poodle-ism, so let's call it a day. That's the end of everything inside the page-quota nineteen.

20

Ho-ho! Now this is manly. The Professor threw down his left glove. To the barrier, sir! It's a real challenge. We're entering the lists—or as our ancestors said, “crawling onto the fight field.” One on one. The challenger picked the weapons: philological-linguistic political science. Good choice—keeps it from turning into a brain-dead shouting match.

And even though Tsar Ivan the Terrible strictly banned elite knights from “crawling a field with a serf,” I wink at the regulation. Forgive me, buddy knights at the SMP-615 people's volunteer watch—the ones from the Konotop train station neighborhood.

“Cut the intros—I'm coming for you, cheeky plebeian...”

God, the market is overflowing with stand-up comic-jesters now. But out of this massive swarm, they're all just basic balalaika players. Every last one plays a three-string instrument: sex, the clinic, and a funny foreign accent.

“And dat is all, boss-man!”

Avdey lunged from the blue corner, playing his third string. He just brainlessly swiped a Ukrainian line and spelled it out in Russian letters—even though both still remained in Cyrillic anyway. “We got a giant horse-laugh out of it, boss-man! All the word-nerds were wetting themselves!” The recent political crisis drove Scumblower to drop this third-rate stand-up joke from the set: “Hey, let's laugh at a funny accent!”

But originally, here is how the story actually developed:

When Moscow Prince Vsevolod “Big Nest” used his cheap penny-pinching to lay the tracks for a centralized police state, the newborn political monster rolled down the road of empire with total evolutionary pre-determination. But in any country—no matter how fat and happy with itself—you'll always find people who are pissed off. People who refuse to adapt to the garbage of the system like the rest of the all-enduring herd.

The absolute first form of non-conformist protest is escape. When a two-month-old citizen starts screaming his head off on a commuter train, you just stuff your phone's earbuds into your ears, right? Oh, look—it's the band Lyube singing “Batanya-Kombat”! You can listen to that junk forever.

But the horror of the situation just drives me to flee into the next train car. Because I'm a weakling, you see...

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