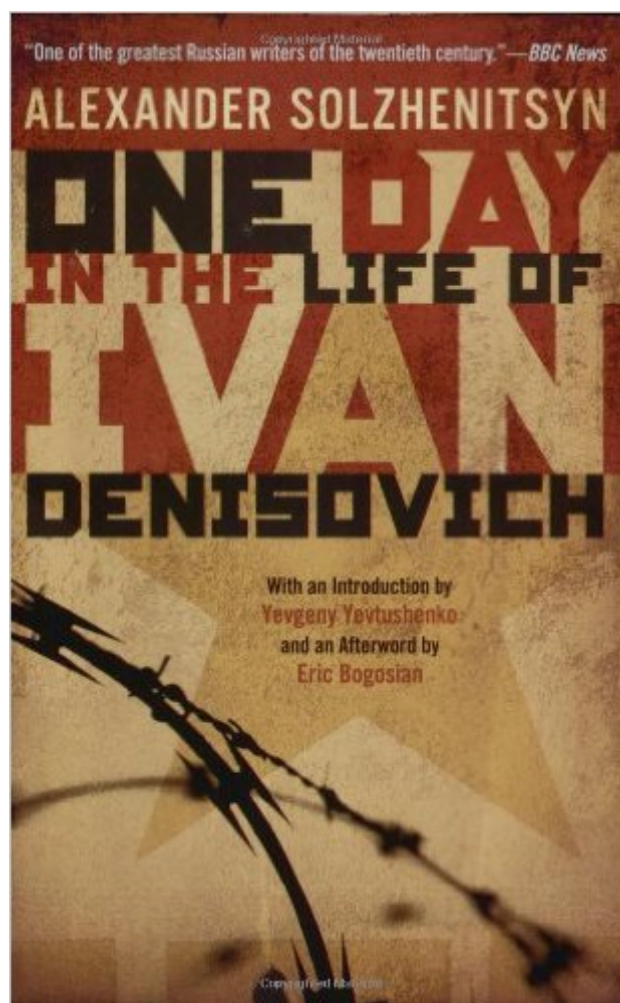


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One Day In The Life Of Ivan Denisovich



Synopsis

The first published novel of controversial Nobel Prize winning author Alexander Solzhenitsyn- now in trade paperback. First published in 1962, this book is considered one of the most significant works ever to emerge from Soviet Russia. Illuminating a dark chapter in Russian history, it is at once a graphic picture of work camp life and a moving tribute to man's will to prevail over relentless dehumanization, told by "a literary genius whose talent matches that of Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, Tolstoy, [and] Gorky" (Harrison Salisbury, New York Times).

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The entirety of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's short novel "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" takes place on a winter day in 1951 in a Siberian labor camp. The title character, Ivan Denisovich Shukhov, has been a prisoner there for the past eight years and has two more to go, provided his sentence isn't extended even longer for no reason at all. As a Soviet soldier in World War II, he was imprisoned after being accused of spying for the Germans, but the novel is concerned more with his daily routine at the camp than with the politics behind his imprisonment. Like anybody who's been in a highly structured and disciplined environment for a long time, Shukhov has developed his own individualized way of living day to day, bending the rules, avoiding punishment, and making life a little more bearable under the circumstances. Temperatures are commonly well below zero and the food is barely nutritional enough to keep the prisoners alive, but Shukhov has adapted well enough to know how to stay warm and make the most out of his meals. On this particular day, Shukhov's squad is forced to work construction; the novel describes how well Shukhov has honed his masonry

skills as he expertly lays blocks and mortar building a wall for a building that will be used to hold future prisoners. Life at the camp has made him tough and independent; his only weakness is tobacco, for which he will beg, borrow, or steal. The novel is based on Solzhenitsyn's own experience as a labor camp prisoner under Stalin's reign, and therefore it has a sincere, natural, brutal quality that not even someone like Orwell could imitate. More than anything, though, it portrays a man whose spirit is strong enough to triumph over the most extreme adversity.

"One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich," by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, is one of those books that look deceptive. It isn't that long, and it's a little mass-market paperback that would blow away with the wind. Even the cover design really doesn't convey what lies inside. What we have with this book is a worthy contribution to the annals of Russian literature. Solzhenitsyn finds himself in the ranks of Tolstoy, Turgenev, and Gogol with this gripping tale of the Stalinist Gulag system. Solzhenitsyn went on to write a massive indictment of the Gulag system in a three-volume work called, "The Gulag Archipelago." Solzhenitsyn won a Nobel Prize for Literature and found himself exiled, forcibly, from the Soviet Union for his writings. He returned to Russia after the collapse of Communism. As the title indicates, the story covers one day in Ivan Denisovich's ten-year prison sentence. Ivan is a peasant who runs afoul of the authorities when the Germans capture him during the war. When he finds his way back to the Soviet camp, the authorities charge him with treason and sentence him to the camps. Denisovich is luckier than many of his fellow convicts; they are serving 25-year sentences. This day is better for Ivan than most; he ends up getting a better work assignment, a member of his squad gets a parcel loaded with food, and Ivan manages to get extra food rations. He even scores some tobacco, his only weakness. Ivan lives day by day; it is the only way he can survive the camps. What is most shocking about this book is the matter-of-fact way in which the story is told. All of life is reduced to acquiring food and staying warm. Following the rules and avoiding punishment is just as important. Woe to the man who ends up in the guardhouse cells for ten days.

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