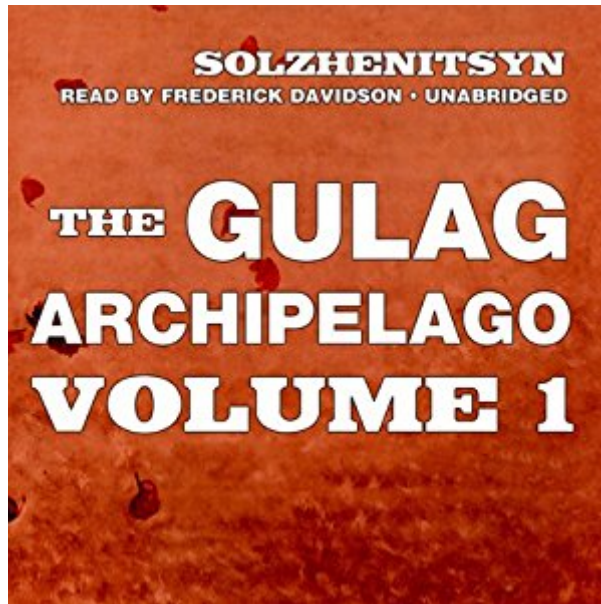


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The Gulag Archipelago, Volume L: The Prison Industry And Perpetual Motion



Synopsis

In this masterpiece, Solzhenitsyn has orchestrated thousands of incidents and individual histories into one narrative of unflagging power and momentum. Written in a tone that encompasses Olympian wrath, bitter calm, savage irony, and sheer comedy, it combines history, autobiography, documentary, and political analysis as it examines in its totality the Soviet apparatus of repression from its inception following the October Revolution of 1917. This volume involves us in the innocent victim's arrest and preliminary detention and the stages by which he is transferred across the breadth of the Soviet Union to his ultimate destination: the hard-labor camp.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The line between good and evil runs through the heart of every human being." This abridged edition of Solzhenitsyn's hauntingly intimate portrait of his own arrest, interrogation, imprisonment, rebellion, and eventual release during Stalin's purges is a book like no other. This book, written by a constantly watched and persecuted dissident - bent but not broken by the brutality of Stalinist work camps, shares the author's (and his other inmates') personal experiences falling into this dark, usually fatal, abyss. Solzhenitsyn's original work was published in 1971 and produced an absolutely damning indictment of communism in Russia. Indeed, the stunning quality and importance of his writing earned him a Nobel prize. Besides his own experiences, Solzhenitsyn collected personal stories from hundreds of his fellow inmates. The sadism of interrogators, the cruelty of guards, the indifference of neighbors, the paranoia of the public, the betrayal of stoolies, and the true comradery of innocent inmates are presented in vivid, factual detail. In addition to this, the author also presents

an encyclopedic knowledge of the entirety of the gigantic Stalinist security apparatus (normal labor camps, special labor camps, transfer camps, railroad transfers, prisons, holding cells, interrogation cells, NKVD, SMERSH, commissars, exile communities, and still more). But at the heart of it all, the book remains an unforgettable journey through man-made hell. Stalin meant to destroy every man, woman, and child arrested, regardless of their innocence, and he largely succeeded. But survivors like Solzhenitsyn did truly 'tear down the wall' and made this world a far better place to live in. We all owe him a huge debt of gratitude!

For any who have any nostalgia for the Soviet Union, this book should put it to rest. This book is hard to categorize; it is more than one man's opinion, but less than an objective history. It is, as Solzhenitsyn puts it, "an experiment in literary investigation": a combination memoir and dissertation on the evils of Communism and its inevitable product, the forced labor camp. Some have criticized Solzhenitsyn as an anti-Communist/pro-Western polemicist, but that is not an accurate description. He is a realist, showing not only the faults of Communists, but also those of the West and Western leaders. This should be required reading for European and world history classes. Volume 1 (of 3) describes the arrest and interrogation procedures, as well as life in the Gulag.

How thin is the veil we call Civilization!! This book is indeed a tedious read by virtue of its length. However, Solzhenitsyn's history is written with the prosaic style of a Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was a Captain in the Soviet Army as it charged through Nazi occupied Poland when he was arrested on trumped-up charges in February 1945. Thus began his odyssey through Gulag, "the country within a country". The perpetually weak economy of Communism could not survive without the forced labor of millions of its own citizens who became prisoners for one reason or another, or no reason at all. Solzhenitsyn relates his own experiences as well as those of other prisoners with whom he became acquainted while incarcerated. He relates how ordinary Russians were arrested and charged with fraudulent charges (if charged at all), interrogated, tortured and forced to confess under extreme duress, and sent off to labor for the good of the Motherland. Throughout the book, Solzhenitsyn asks the reader incredulously, "how did we let this happen?" That is no doubt one of the most important questions posed in all of human history. If we study history in order to prevent the repetition of our mistakes, then Solzhenitsyn's work should be required reading of all residents of Planet Earth.

It is hard to measure how profound a book like this is, because it covers such a wide range of

subjects almost subtly. The things that you are likely to remember are the descriptions of torture, the small amounts of food, and so forth. What you remember is the things that made you cringe, and realise that you probably would have given up had you been placed in the same situation. But as Solzhenitsyn tried repeatedly to bring out, it was the so-called "little" things that really either killed you, or gave you hope. As an example, many people might recall the sticking of hot metal up certain areas of the human anatomy; but as Solzhenitsyn said, this was most often not necessary. Seemingly mundane (relatively speaking) things like sleep deprivation was enough to drive even the most stable men insane. It was not the hot flash of pain that would get most people, but the exhaustion of wakefulness. Monotony could be every bit as much your enemy as freezing temperatures; and it was just as likely to send you to your death. These are but two examples, Solzhenitsyn gives up many more. If there is any book that can and should be read by everyone, it is this book. One need not be interested in communism, political theory, or such things for this book to have meaning. This book is above all about the human condition. It is a biography and autobiography about every man who has ever suffered greatly, and it is a lesson to every man who has never suffered greatly.

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