



# Ice

*Vladimir Sorokin , Jamey Gambrell (Translator)*

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*Ice* is at the center of Vladimir Sorokin's epic *Ice Trilogy*, which is also published by NYRB Classics.

Moscow has been hit by a wave of brutal murders. The victims are of both sexes, from different backgrounds, and of all ages, but invariably blond and blue-eyed. They are found with their breastbones smashed in, their hearts crushed. There is no sign of any motive.

Drugs, sex, and violence are the currency of daily life in Moscow. Criminal gangs and unscrupulous financial operators run the show. But in the midst of so much squalor one mysterious group is pursuing a long-meditated plan. Blond and blue-eyed, with a strange shared attraction to a chunk of interstellar ice, they are looking for their brothers and sisters, precisely 23,000 of them. Lost among the common herd of humanity, they must be awakened and set free. How? With a crude hammer fashioned out of the cosmic ice. Humans, meat machines, die under its blows. The hearts of the chosen answer by uttering their true names. For the first time they know the ecstasy of true life.

For the awakened, the future, like the past, is simple. It is ice.

What is *Ice*? A gritty dispatch from the front lines of the contemporary world, a gnostic fairy tale, a hard-boiled parable, a New Age parody, a biting funny fantasy in the great Russian tradition that begins with Gogol and continues with Nabokov, a renegade fiction to set beside those of Philip K. Dick and Michel Houellebecq, and the most ambitious and accomplished novel yet by Vladimir Sorokin, the stylistic virtuoso and master of provocation who, in the words of *The Moscow Times*, is “the only living Russian author who can be called a classic.”

## Ice Details

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## WhatIReallyRead says

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## Patrick O'Neil says

Um... not sure what is going on here. But I am lost and not going to continue on - that is all.

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## Ghiomara Beov says

Había leído my buenas reseñas de este libro y la verdad es que no sé si me gusto o no, es como esos libros que te dejan sin saber si fue malísimo o demasiado bueno, es muy raro, entre mesiánico y material. No se quiero leer otro libro del autor para comprender mejor su pluma.

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## Lisa Hayden Espenschade says

The only reason I gave "Ice" two stars is that I finished the book... "Ice" chronicles the activity of certain blue-eyed, blond-haired people who search for others that look like themselves. When they find them, they bang on their chests with icy hammers. Some hammerers respond by speaking their “true” names through their hearts; they are rehabilitated. The rest, the “empties,” are left to die.

There are many layers to the book that I won't detail, lest you, too, get sucked into this slippery mess and want to discover its core. Be ready: "Ice" may max out your capabilities for the willing suspension of disbelief.

Sorokin divides his book into several stylistically dissimilar sections that he links with the ice motif. The first part of "Ice" takes place in contemporary Russia, and the heart hammerers resemble a Russian criminal group. This part of the book is brutal, at least in the Russian original, with so much gratuitous and graphic violence, swearing, sex, and other ickiness that many readers may want to abandon the novel. (A friend did when I lent her the book.)

Why did I keep reading? For one, I wanted to finish the book to get a feel for why Sorokin has caused so much controversy. One lesson learned: Sorokin's love for writing about bathroom-related topics made it obvious why Putin's youth group Walking Together (????? ?????) used a toilet to collect Sorokin books during a protest.

Still, I have to, grudgingly, give Sorokin some credit: he has a decent sense of timing and knows how to manipulate the reader to finish a book. Just as the violence and abuse in *Ice* became too much, Sorokin shifted his narrative. By this point, it was too late for me to put the book down because my interest was piqued. Would the book get better? Were the hammerers an Aryan cult? What did the heart have to do with everything? Or anything? Would I send my copy of "Ice" to Moscow for flushing?

I finished and kept it. The book calmed down some but didn't exactly improve, meaning that, unfortunately, the answers to the other questions are murky. In terms of meaning, "Ice" is as empty as the heartless victims of the hammer, and I won't consult the other installments of Sorokin's trilogy for further clarification. Once is enough, thanks.

There's more about "Ice" on my blog: "Vladimir Sorokin's 'Ice Capades'"

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## Glenn Russell says

Finnish-Estonian production of *Ice* based of Vladimir Sorokin's novel performed at the Von Krahle Theatre in Helsinki

Riveting. Absolutely riveting.

And this riveting, spellbinding novel comes in two different flavors. You get to choose which one might suit your taste.

Flavor number one is to read *Bro* before *Ice*. Flavor number two is reading *Ice* without having read *Bro*. Permit me to elaborate.

*Bro* is Volume #1 of Vladimir Sorokin's *Ice Trilogy*. *Bro* is the first person account of how a young Russian by the name of Alexander Snegirey has his heart awakened by Primordial Light in 1928. As part of his awakening he is given the name of Bro and told he must find his Brothers and Sisters who have also been chosen to likewise have their hearts awakened. The novel takes readers on Bro's breathtaking adventure up until 1950. *Ice* continues the thread of the story beginning in the year 2000. Thus *Bro* provides not only historic context for *Ice* but puts the reader in the know about those who come to have their hearts awakened.

I'm glad I read *Bro* prior to reading *Ice* since I generally like to follow a story chronologically. Added to this, I would make the world's worst detective - much better for me to know the basic facts of what's going on rather than being kept in the dark.

British critic Michael Froggatt disagrees. In his review for *Strange Horizons* Mr. Froggatt judges *Ice* the strongest novel in the trilogy and goes on to say how reading *Bro* lessens the mystery and suspense of *Ice*. He concludes by suggesting a reader who is interested in tackling Vladimir Sorokin's *Ice Trilogy* to begin with *Ice* and work outwards.

Either way, *Ice* possesses an intensity, a surging drive right from the first pages. The narrative voice is detached, hard-edge, objective, as if a journalist recording the nitty-gritty of combat in a war zone. We encounter drug dealers, drug addicts, prostitutes, bottom of the barrel ruck and their coarse, crude, brutal, blunt way of speaking and dealing with one another – a novel not for the squeamish.

Many of the men and women are given a special call-out. Two examples: “Ilona: 17 years old, tall, thin, with a lively laughing face, leather pants, platform shoes, a white top.” - “Borenboim: 44 years old, medium height, thinning blonde hair, an intelligent face, blue eyes, thin glasses in gold frames, a dark green three-piece suit.”

There's mystery afoot, a stroke of Vladimir Sorokin infusion of radical myth mixed in with cosmic science fiction: these denizens of Moscow's concrete canyons wonder what the hell is going on with the ice and all those primitive looking ice hammers. And the shift in their feelings. The contrast between the scummy day-to-day lives of these people and what they eventually feel in their hearts is quite striking: hard-as-nails drug kingpin Borenboim talking about his tender heart; likewise Nikolaeva the prostitute - very funny in an odd, offbeat way.

Two glimmers of refinement in this dank, cesspool world: Borenboim has a collection of Borges stories in his briefcase and Mozart is playing softly at a rehabilitation center. In Moscow 2000 overflowing with hard rock and liquor, gadgets, computer games and Hollywood posters, to know at least somebody appreciates Borges and Mozart is most refreshing.

*Part Two* switches to an old lady's first person account retracing her childhood in a poor Russian village under Nazi occupation and her joining others villagers herded off to Germany to work in a factory. But then something remarkable happens. She's singled out since she has blonde hair and blue eyes. What follows thereafter ties her to a strange brotherhood. Her worldview is forever transformed – from 1950 right up until 2000, the grueling, gritty details of her earthbound, everyday routine take a distant second to her true identity and mission.

One of the most stimulation dimensions of *Ice* is the way in which the story raises a number of philosophical issues. How bound are member of a particular religious cult or sect by their beliefs? Jim Jones and the mass suicides/mass murders in Jonestown, David Koresh and the Branch Davidians going up in flames in their compound in Waco, Marshall Applewhite leading Heaven's Gate members in mass suicide - we need only think of these events to know that sects and cults can be closely linked to violence and death.

And considering the frequent instances of torture, imprisonment and murder throughout history perpetuated in the name of religion, how far are the major religions removed from sects and cults? Any time members view others through the lens of “us versus them” watch out. Brutality and viciousness of one stripe or the other usually isn't far behind.

What are we to make of the fellowship in *Ice*? Those initiates speak of opening the heart but how open is their heart to those outside their fellowship? Referring to “ordinary” humans as meat machines unworthy of life has a frightening ring. And this reference to libraries; "Thousands of meat machines were always sitting there, engaged in silent madness: they attentively leafed through sheets of paper covered with letters." Sounds like a rant spouted by a semi-illiterate thug.

Witnessing the horrors of twentieth century totalitarian governments is hardly less disturbing. And how about the omnipresence of contemporary multinational corporations? Perhaps Vladimir Sorokin in his sly way is commenting on the dangers of all forms of power and coercion reducing individuals to hungry consumers or meat machines.

Even if *Ice* is the only novel within the trilogy one reads, it is well worth it. For fans of the author, both old and new, nothing short of all three volumes will do.

Russian author Vladimir Sorokin

"Then I saw OUR PEOPLE again. Their hearts shone. And they swarm around me. There were more and more of them. I reached out to more and more new ones, to ones that were far, far away. And finally, I saw the hearts of ALL OUR PEOPLE on this gloomy planet." - Vladimir Sorokin, *Ice*

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### **Cenhner Scott says**

Si este es el primero de una trilogía, yo imagino que la explicación de lo que leí está en los otros dos libros. Este en particular trata sobre la nada. La primera parte cuenta tres veces lo mismo. La segunda parte es un resumen de la historia de Rusia en el siglo XX. La tercera parte es lo mismo que la primera, pero más resumido. La cuarta parte no la entendí.

Le di dos estrellas por eso, porque al ser la primera parte de una trilogía evidentemente hay algo que falta, que no entendí. Pero tampoco me dan ganas de leer los otros dos libros...

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### **Peter says**

Russian Writers have a history of using Science Fiction and Mystery to tell allegorical tales of a society deeply troubled. This is a good modern example, one that vividly leaves the reader mulling and scrounging for reference points and deeper meaning. It is a good read, a stimulating intellectual adventure.

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### **Jonathan McKay says**

An odd satire that depicts new-agey, material self-fulfillment as a fascist project run by fruit and grain eating Aryans who kill thousands of people looking for those whose hearts "speak" and who view those whose don't as disposable "meat machines." Despite being in translation, there are some major flaws here, most notably the heavy reliance on dream sequences and an unnecessarily repetitious plot.



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### **Ivana says**

Uf.

Táto to kniha je asi výsledkom toho, čo dostanete, keď New Age a ezoterické nápady prevrátite a využijete v románe, ktorý je niečo ako urban-scifi. Sorokin píše majstrovsky a majstrovský je aj Štrasserov preklad, tiež preskakuje medzi spoločenskými vrstvami áhúťko. Takisto ako poskakuje časom a rôznymi formami. Reklama, recenzie na výrobok, oral history. Všeličo zmiešané a ľadom zlepené. Našťastie tak nebezpečne modré oči nemám.

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### **Kata says**

This book doesn't deserve a star. I read it out of two reasons. One, because my mother insisted that I should. Two, my old high school friend brought it on stage. so I read it, and I did not get this contemporary fairy tale. Part I kept my interest, but Part II and the rest, lost my patience.

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### **Ben says**

The translation could be better, but it still gives readers a good sense of Sorokin's style and dominant themes. A bit of an odd choice to release in English, as it's the first of a trilogy. Still, it stands well on its own, as the story traces the journey of a bizarre cult of 20,000 chosen ones, out to find their brothers by beating people with ice hammers...

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### **Book Wurm says**

I was quite absorbed in this mental sodomy until half way through when a monologue began, taking up most of the following pages and all about a new character I just could not give a toss about, though I did slog through it.

It's a bit repetitive, horrendously violent and somehow manages to explain its incredibly weird premise, yet still left me scratching my head in confusion with what I'd just read.

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### **Thaddeus Croyle says**

Ugh. This started so so and just plummeted halfway through. Am I missing something? Was this better in the original? With so many great titles in the series, how the heck did this get in?

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### **Charles Puskas says**

I greatly enjoyed this gnostic tale set in the 20th & 21st centuries by one of Russia's greatest living novelists. He creatively addresses many questions raised by those who have read the ancient esoteric mystical texts. Who are the enlightened few? How are they identified & how do they receive enlightenment? A dualistic cosmogony in Part two plots out the course that the enlightened must follow in the dreary, dismal world they currently inhabit. The meaning of love & the language of the heart are profoundly expressed (in a platonic manner). Publisher's summary: Moscow has been hit by a wave of brutal murders. The victims are of both sexes, from different backgrounds, and of all ages, but invariably blond and blue-eyed. They are found with their breastbones smashed in, their hearts crushed. There is no sign of any motive. Ice is at the center of Vladimir Sorokin's epic Ice Trilogy, which is also published by NYRB Classics.

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## **Lori says**

The dust jacket calls this book "a gritty dispatch," "a gnostic fairy tale," "a hard-boiled parable," "a New Age parody, "a bitingly funny fantasy" and "an important novel."

I suppose it's possible it's all of those things. Or any. And I Just Did Not Get It.

It was weird as all get out, yet I keep reading, thinking the whacking-people-with-ice-hammers-to-find-their-heart-voice-or-kill-them was somehow going to start making sense. Instead, it got more confusing, with the blond-haired, blue-eyed Nazi connection, the 23 rays of light, the meat machines and the space ICE. And don't forget the ritual heart-talk/naked-bodies-pressed-together-but-we're-siblings concept. Or the things that pimp made his whore do.

Maybe it lost something in translation from the original Russian. There were certainly clunky scenes, particularly the ones involving sex. Maybe it did read "His penis was in her vagina" in the original text. Romance writers, fear not.

As if that weren't enough, it changed narration style, going from third to first person and then on to product endorsements (no more kidnapping and whacking with hammers needed; potentials were given ready-made kits to try it themselves in the name of healing).

This may be the first book I've ever read that had a World Literature Today blurb on the back. Clearly, it was capital-I important. And I'm capital-I Ignorant.

Vladimir, give me a call. I apparently need some tutoring in whatever commentary on the world you were trying to share.

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