



One More Son

Matvei Zhivov

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Lives of two soldiers clash together in a haunting tale of violence, love, sacrifice, and revenge, as a U.S. Marine and a Russian flight engineer trapped in Afghanistan struggle to out-run the ghosts of their pasts.

When one of them kills a family in the heat of battle, he smuggles the surviving infant back to the homeland, and begins a new life... fighting through the demons and the guilt.

Meanwhile, the other... the one whose family was killed sets out on a trail of revenge – to destroy the kin of the man who took his own.

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One More Son Details

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Grady says

The Pity and Constancy of War

Matvei Zhivov emerges as one of the most significant writers in this decade with the publishing of ONE MORE SON. Attempts to find out more about him are almost futile: he apparently is a screenwriter, actor, director, film editor and producer for such films as 'The Pirate Tapes', and perhaps that explains why this his first novel so closely resembles a screenplay. Whatever his credentials he emerges here as a writer who has defined the inexplicably interminable state of war in Afghanistan for the past forty plus years.

Zhivov's story begins in present day Afghanistan where US troops are 'aiding' the Afghans in fighting the Taliban and we meet medic Jack Colgen assigned to the Marines as he protects an infant male, the sole survivor of the bombing of a household. We jump back to 1988 when the Russians were in Afghanistan to assist the Afghans in their resistance to the mujahideen rebel forces (incidentally, supplied with weapons from the US to ferret out the Russian forces!) and meet Ivan, a Russian soldier who is eventually captured and imprisoned until he becomes a Muslim to survive. He marries a woman who befriends him while he was imprisoned and when finally freed to work for the Taliban is able to marry the girl and have three children, shedding his Russian connections and becoming an Afghan. In switching back and forth between 1988 and the present we learn that it is our medic Jack who finds the family of Ivan dead and saves the younger infant 'Grey' and manages to pay enough money to take the boy home with him where he becomes the young lad's second father, marries the woman Abigail with whom Jack has had a traumatic past and sets up home in the US. When Jack is in the process of saving the lad in Afghanistan the lad's mother (Ivan's wife) grabs Jack's dog tag from his neck and dies with it in her hand. At the time that Ivan returns to his 'home' after the bombing he finds his family dead and saves the dog tag, eventually joining forces with a 'mission' for the Taliban to North America where the two men separated by war years but connected by mutually loved child face off in an ending that serves only as a beginning - the war in Afghanistan continues, as indeed it does today and likely will into the future, which is where the story leads us.

The novel is told in very brief chapters that despite their brevity define each character fully. This is one of those books that captures the reader and holds tightly until the book is finished: it is impossible to put it down once begun. Writing of this quality is rare and likely will be noticed by awards committees. But in addition to a brilliant story, this book demonstrates the brutality and futility and unending madness of war - but especially the war in Afghanistan where in effect the people have been struggling for decades without a hope of peace in sight. It is an eye-opener and one of the most powerful novels to emerge in many years. Highly recommended on every level.

Grady Harp
