

BA
BOOK



Russian Political Prisoners

AUTO-GRAPH

Answer 13 Questions from Boris Akunin





*Stefano di Giovanni (1392-1450):
Blessed Ranieri Frees the Poor
from a Prison in Florence*

FROM THE COMPILER*

There are many political prisoners in Russia, and their number is only increasing. It's axiomatic: the less freedom there is in a country, the more people are imprisoned for their beliefs. Before February 24, 2022, the authorities usually sentenced political prisoners on far-fetched criminal charges. Now political repression has become blatant. People are jailed for speaking out, for writing on social networks, for any form of civil protest. The security services have become very active, and in order to demonstrate vigilance and distinguish themselves before their superiors, they often grab random people and fabricate a "case".

This is all some kind of perennial Russian *déjà-vu*, a recurring bad dream.

The only thing that can counteract the onslaught of the "arrestocracy" in a police state is solidarity with those who are behind bars.

There are a few political prisoners who are remembered, whose names are on everyone's lips. But there are a hundred times more who are little known or not known at all to the public. For these people it is especially hard. They

feel isolated, abandoned, forgotten.

We can't let that happen.

Russia would not be Russia if there weren't people who, despite all the risks, help political prisoners: they send food, clothes, books, and, most importantly, support them morally and correspond with them.

A group of such volunteers asked me to write a letter to be sent to prisons and pre-trial detention centers. Their idea made sense: a letter from a famous person is proof that people care about your fate, that the world has not forgotten you. I wasn't the only one who was approached and who agreed to take part in this campaign. But I came up with a counter proposal.

At the time, I was conducting an AUTO-GRAPH survey of creative people. Thirteen simple yet difficult questions that reveal personality. I planned to publish an e-book of 13 chapters and all proceeds would go to a children's hospice (*Dom s mayakom*) in Moscow. The book appeared and, I think, turned out to be very interesting. Some seemingly well-known people revealed themselves in an unexpected light.

Then it occurred to me that the same questions should be put to political prisoners, so that readers would see not some abstract “prisoners of conscience,” but real people. Readers would learn what they think and feel. And want to support them.

Here’s the letter I wrote so that volunteers could forward it to their correspondents:

Hello,

This is Grigory Chkhartishvili (Boris Akunin). I, like so many others, admire your fearlessness and am very worried about you.

It seems to me that the most important thing today is to change the attitude of Russian society towards political prisoners. To explain to those who are not interested in politics why these people behave the way they do, regardless of all the risks and consequences.

I am conducting a survey called AUTO-GRAPH whose most important questions are not political, but attitudinal. Writers, famous journalists, and public intellectuals have been invited to participate.

But I would like my audience, hundreds of thousands of ordinary people, to learn how these questions would be answered by political prisoners. This would explain your motives better than any political declaration.

Selected responses will be published on my BAbok website and its social media channels.

Please know that few people today have the courage to stand up for their beliefs at the cost of their own freedom, but there are many who have deep respect for you and would like to express their support. Let these people get to know you (and you personally) better.

In the hope that the darkness will dissipate and you will again be free.

G.Sh. Chkhartishvili

AUTO-GRAPH

1. HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE YOURSELF? WHO ARE YOU?
2. WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IN?
3. WHAT DO YOU RELY ON WHEN MAKING THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISIONS—YOUR REASON OR YOUR GUT FEELING?
4. WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU IN LIFE?
5. WHAT BRINGS YOU THE MOST JOY?
6. WHAT MOST SADDENS YOU?
7. WHAT, IN YOUR OPINION, BRINGS MAN AND MANKIND THE GREATEST EVIL?
8. AND THE GREATEST BENEFIT?
9. WHICH ART FORM HAS THE STRONGEST EFFECT ON YOU?
10. DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE QUOTE OR MAXIM? WHAT IS IT?
11. WHICH OF THE BOOKS YOU HAVE READ IS THE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?
12. IS THERE A PERSON, PAST OR PRESENT, WHOM YOU CONSIDER A ROLE MODEL?
13. WHAT IS RUSSIA TO YOU TODAY?

Many prisoners did not receive this letter: the prison censors did not let it through. The same was true of many of the responses: they were not allowed out. Even so, there were a lot of replies. So many that I compiled a book of them.

You all know Alexei Navalny (p. 250), Ilya Yashin (p. 390), Vladimir Kara-Murza (p. 159), Ivan Safronov (p. 300), Boris Kagarlitsky (p. 152), Alexander Shestun (p. 380), Mikhail Kriger (p. 186), Svetlana Petriyчук (p. 283), Zhenya Berkovich (p. 106), and perhaps a few other respondents. But among the “unfamous” prisoners (see Index, p. 396) are some absolutely remarkable people whose names I did not know, and now I do. You will surely notice them too.

And all of the respondents, all without exception, make one want to support and help them.

It’s a powerful read. The amazing thing is that it’s not at all depressing.

The respondents are all very different, of course. But they have two things in common.

First, their courage is significantly above average. Here we have *homo interritus*, a person who is not afraid.

Secondly, instead of looking under their feet, they mostly look around and up. They are interested in big subjects and big ideas.

The goal of an “arrestocratic” regime is to isolate the brave and the far-sighted so that everyone else will be afraid and not look too hard at the reality.

This book consists of two parts. Part One has 13 chapters, one for each question. Each chapter contains only a small selection of the responses received, enough to give readers a general idea. Part Two will allow readers to become better acquainted with individual respondents. Here you will find brief biographies followed by his or her answers to all 13 questions. In other words, Part One deals with the theme, Part Two with the personality.

This book can be bought at any price—low, high, or very high, depending on your means. Every penny raised will go to help Russian political prisoners.

Finally, and most importantly: about the wonderful volunteers who ran this project. I can’t even say that they helped me. It was I who helped them.

I cannot name those of them who are in Russia. Therefore, I will name with gratitude only those whom I can.

Ilya Zernov, Irina Trefilova, Vladimir Sytin, Angelina Chekalina, Tatiana Kutepova, Anastasia Oranzhevaya, Anna Kamardina and everyone else—my thanks to you.

And, of course, a huge thanks to the Memorial Human Rights Center, which collects data on political prisoners. The biographical information comes mainly from Memorial.

It would be wonderful if, after reading this book, you could write a personal letter to one of the respondents. For their address, please write to krylov.e.box@gmail.com.

Grigory Chkhartishvili

Part One
THIRTEEN
QUESTIONS

1. HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE YOURSELF? WHO ARE YOU?

The forcible deprivation of the freedom so prized by most respondents is an imposed situation in which it is natural to ask oneself this question. Who am I? Why am I here?

This is the most extensive selection. I have chosen all those answers from which you can get an idea of the person.

Oleg BELOUSOV (56 years old)

I'm an ordinary person who has never done anyone any harm, who has never wished anyone any harm; without militaristic or imperial ambitions; living my life of small pleasures.

Zhenya BERKOVICH (38 years old)

I'm Zhenya Berkovich. Nowadays it's crucial that I not define myself as belonging to any group: theater director, prisoner, mother, feminist, poet, etc. The important thing is that I am just me.

Natalia VERKHOVA (54 years old)

I'm a free person, and this freedom does not depend in any way on external circumstances.

Boris GONCHARENKO (35 years old)

It's hard to define oneself. Well, put it this way: by education, I'm a philosopher; by profession, a teacher and lecturer. I'm also a staunch pacifist; and now I'm a detainee, one accused....

Dmitry GROMOVOY (40 years old)

I'm a fighter against injustice, a human rights activist, and a bit of an investigative journalist.

Andrei EDIGAREV (61 years old)

This may be the most difficult question: “Who am I?” I define myself as a free man, a citizen of the world and a patriot of Russia. Of Russia, not of the regime and what is associated with it.

Anton ZHUCHKOV (40 years old)

A perpetual student; a dreamer from the virtual world of gaming.

Konstantin ZELTSEV (20 years old)

A human being first and foremost, of course! Kind, compassionate, fair, caring, ready to help in any situation!

Antonina ZIMINA (37 years old)

A person who is trying to survive in a prison camp and—if I’m very, very lucky—to remain a human being.

Boris KAGARLITSKY (65 years old)

A human being. If you’re interested in my political views, I’m a socialist, a democrat, and a Marxist. If you’re interested in my academic pursuits, I’m a sociologist, a political scientist, and an historian.

Dmitry KAMYNNIN (39 years old)

A man caught in a trap.

Vladimir KARA-MURZA (42 years old)

A politician, an historian, and a journalist. In that order.

Yan KATELEVSKY (42 years old)

People often ask who I am, and I often reply: a carpenter with an eighth-grade education, born and raised in Ramenskoye, Moscow Region. I hate liars, scoundrels, and injustice. I'm not apathetic and cannot walk by when lawlessness occurs. I became a journalist out of necessity, so as to bring justice to the masses.

Konstantin KOCHANOV (26 years old)

I am the protagonist of my life, my story, my conscience.

Vladislav KRAVAL (48 years old)

I'm a romantic rebel.

Pavel KRISEVICH (23 years old)

I define myself as an artist. Not professionally, but by the way I look at the world. They say that a person manifests his faith by finding his place. When I began to identify as an artist, I saw that that was my place, because

it was as if my whole life had been leading up to that. In this capacity, I became aware of new interests and inclinations as well as of opportunities for developing them. And I recognized that I could work not just for my own future, but for the future of those around me. So, yes, I guess with this definition I truly realized that I could serve people, and not just build myself up, as I had been doing while in search of this definition.

Dmitry KULIKOV (58 years old)

How do I define myself? As someone interested in all areas of human endeavor, except politics and global finance. Graphic designer (C+); photographer (B+); plumber; electrician; carpenter; geologist; bicyclist (it would be easier to shoot this crowd than to feed it). Who am I? That's for the court to decide (just kidding). I'm a simple hardworking man! Work from morning till evening, sleep at night. In the morning again... I remember, in winter once, long ago, I went out in the snowfall to the viaduct to shovel a path so that my wife could safely take our daughter to kindergarten in the morning without slipping. A woman walking by suddenly became indignant: she thought I was a paid sweeper and told me I was doing a bad job. I advised her to keep walking or I'd come after her with my shovel,

because I was a pedestrian just like her. She ran away, grumbling under her breath...

Alexei KURLOV (32 years old)

The question of self-definition is difficult to answer, because every reader will see something different and interpret that in their own way. Still, I will try to answer it. I am a lonely Harlequin who makes everyone laugh, who entertains, and helps others at his own expense, but I am alone, sad and helpless, ready to engage in chivalry and exploits.

Yegor KUSONETS (19 years old)

A human being, first and foremost.

Maxim LYPKAN (18 years old)

At the moment, I would define myself as a person of liberal views and an opponent of the adventures of the current government. My name is Maxim Lypkan and I'm in Butyrsky Prison for my words, for criticizing Putin's policies, and for protesting against his international crimes, the war, and crimes against human rights inside Russia. I plan to go to university and study chemistry.

Marina MELIKHOVA (52 years old)

An immortal divine Soul in a human body, made in

the image of the Creator!

Alexei NAVALNY (47 years old)

From the prison authorities, I constantly hear this disgruntled phrase: “Hmm. You seem to be in a good mood today...” So I guess it’s like this: I am a political prisoner who very much misses his family, work and colleagues, but who keeps in good spirits. I am also, of course, a reader. I spend most of my day with a book in my hands.

Igor NAGIBIN (64 years old)

I am an ordinary person, born in the USSR, in Kazakhstan. In 1993 I was forced to leave Kazakhstan for the Russian Federation at the age of 33. Like all Russians, I feel badly when there is injustice somewhere. I consider it my duty to restore justice, relying on my Reason and Conscience, and using my Consciousness.

Alexei NURIYEV (38 years old)

I would probably define myself as a person who cares about the fate of the country and its future. An active member of a sane society.

Sergei OZEROV (51 years old)

Who am I? I'm an ordinary person from an ordinary working-class family. I've had many different trials in my life, there are some for which I berate myself for having acted as I did, and some for which I'm proud of having made the right choice and my conscience doesn't gnaw at me. During my time in prison, I've received a huge number of letters from different corners of the world. In these letters, people see me as an example and are proud of my actions. Which flatters me. But I'm still just an ordinary person, with my own nuttinesses.

Pyotr OPALNIK (45 years old)

A positive young old man, resilient and cheerful.

Svetlana PETRIYCHUK (43 years old)

Right now, as a person who has been attacked by absurdity :). But in general, it's important to me to be and remain a human being who has not lost her dignity.

Igor POKUSIN (61 years old)

I'm a poet-pilot.

Ildar SADRIYEV (32 years old)

I'm a human being, first and foremost. From child-

hood, my father taught me that no matter where I am, in no matter what situation, I must always remain a human being. In my understanding, a human being is honest with himself, first of all, and fair, which generally determines whether he has honor and dignity.

Ivan SAFRONOV (33 years old)

I am a person who is in prison, but who even in prison tries to find a little freedom. And I do.

Dmitry SKURIKHIN (49 years old)

I've been a self-employed entrepreneur for 27 years; a happy husband and five-time dad for 25 years; a regional social and political activist for 18 years. When I say this in prison, they ask: "So who are you?" I say: "Do you know who Navalny is?" "Well, yeah." "I'm the local Navalny." "Oh, now I get it." Politically, I'm a liberal and a democrat (only please don't confuse me with LDPR!). While the PARNAS party existed, I was its activist. While the Open Russia movement existed, I was its coordinator in the Leningrad Region.

Olga SMIRNOVA (55 years old)

Who am I? I suppose I'm a fairly standard member

of my generation, a person who made all my generation's mistakes, but will never forget the feeling of freedom at the outset [under Gorbachev and Yeltsin]. Even if that freedom was just a "demo version", it made me organically incapable of living in any version of an "artificial paradise" built on self-deception.

Maxim SMYSHLYAEV (41 years old)

I'm one of many people who never realized their dream of becoming a teacher.

Alexander STRUKOV (30 years old)

I'm definitely an "enemy of the people". I feel that way myself, and my cellmates often joke about it and ironize. I try not to discuss politics in my cell, but even without that everyone knows my views. I condemn Russia's actions. But I condemn society more, because the tragedy is happening with the tacit consent of the majority. Every day people die, the unacceptable happens. I'm trying to choose my words so that this text will pass the censorship. Society doesn't care. People are only worried about their families, their jobs, their careers. They have put their well-being above that of a fragile world. They've shown selfishness and indifference. I want nothing to do with citizens of the Russian Federation, I would rather be

an “enemy of the people” of this society than be part of it and have the same passport and flag. I’m sure that many people will disagree with me. Even in my cell there’s another political prisoner who strongly disagrees with my views. Time will judge us.

Dmitry TALANTOV (63 years old)

I’m someone who asks himself that question all the time.

Andrei TROFIMOV (57 years old)

I’m actually a traveler. Ever since my geologist parents started dragging me “into the field” as a small child, I’ve been unable to stop. With school buddies and my physics teacher on bicycles. With a university friend, and then with my wife in a canoe. With my sons in a white Zaporozhets [cheap Soviet car made in Ukraine]. Again with my wife on trains, by plane, again in a canoe and again on bicycles. Now I’m alone, but look where! Here and now I’m on the FSIN [Federal Penitentiary Service] Archipelago. I’m a political prisoner. It’s a sort of job: to be a walking compendium of meanings. I contain fearlessness, both behavioral and intellectual. [Actress Liya] Akhedzhakova put it beautifully: “Guys, don’t be silent. We’re all gonna die anyway!”

The other part of a political prisoner’s job was shown in the movie “To Kill a Dragon” [1988]. Lancelot receives

a message from his comrades-in-arms in prison: they ask him to change his name. Instead he comes out of hiding, takes up his sword and destroys everything.

Political prisoners motivate those on the outside.

Nikita TUSHKANOV (29 years old)

I'm a history teacher. I was born and lived for a long time in a village. I have the characteristics of both a peasant and a city dweller. Like in the song by Boris Grebenshchikov: "But if I could choose myself, I would become myself again."

Ruslan USHAKOV (30 years old)

I'm a vegan activist, political prisoner, musician, criminologist and designer.

Natalia FILONOVA (63 years old)

A protester with the tendencies of a Mother Teresa. I remember myself as a little girl of five, with bangs cut short and a stubborn look, beside my young and happy parents and my little disabled brother, whom I adored and pitied, and later carried piggyback to the movies. Since then, I've considered it my duty to help people; I've insisted on it. I have criticized my superiors without considering the conse-

quences. Instead, my actions have always been guided by my conscience, by my views of life, and by fairness. After eighth grade, I decided to save agriculture in the Chita Region (now Trans-Baikalia). I enrolled in the Nerchinsk State Farming Technical School. Even though I was a good student and showed promise, I was expelled after I organized a group against the directorate for treating students unfairly. I was only 15... Today, more than 45 years later, my inner feelings haven't changed....

Valentin KHOROSHENIN (22 years old)

Given the availability of only two sheets, I will allow myself to answer in less detail than I would have liked, confining myself to labels plus a brief explanation. I am a Christian. The Gospel and the Social Teachings of the Roman Catholic Church have strongly influenced my worldview. I am a family man. I stand up for those near and dear to me, I respect my parents and intend to start a family with my beloved bride. I am a citizen who loves his country, and who distinguishes between the concepts of "Fatherland" and "Your Majesty". I'm an educator, immodest as that may sound, but in St. Petersburg I was

actively engaged in popularizing the scientific humanities. I'm still convinced that change will come from attitudinal changes in citizens, not otherwise.

Alexander SHESTUN (59 years old)

This is the hardest question. My daughter calls me a passionarian. It's true. I'm ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of justice and the betterment of Russia's welfare! I hate lies, cruelty, imperialism, [Russian chauvinists] and the morons who think they are the masters of life. Today at the hospital in Tver, where I was taken for a consultation, I objected to the [militarist] "Z" on the doors, and to all the money being spent on armaments instead of on hospitals—and was nearly torn to pieces by some elderly women! Good thing my escort was armed! :)

Yegor SHTOVBA (23 years old)

Who am I? I would describe myself now as a creative person who wants to explore everything in the world.

Alexei YANOCHKIN (44 years old)

I'm a veteran of combat operations (1999-2000). I did my required military service in Dagestan and Chechnya. I'm also a volunteer animal rights activist. I met my fiancée because of our shared love of animals. I was picking up a dog from the local shelter—it had been left outside a store.

Ilya YASHIN (40 years old)

I am a person who cares and is interested in life.

2. WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IN?

Political prisoners are usually imprisoned for their beliefs, i.e. their faith. So it's very important to know about each of these people: in what does she or he believe? For what are they going through such trials?

Zhenya BERKOVICH

I believe that no one is born a scoundrel, that at heart everyone wants to be good. And under certain conditions, they can be. Everyone.

Andrei BOYARSHINOV

I believe in the Universe and its principal law—the Law of Attraction.

Andrei EDIGAREV

I believe in justice, in goodness, and in a person's sincere relationship with their friends, family, nature, and the world around them.

Mikhail ZHARIKOV

I believe in man, that he and only he can determine his fate and future. I believe in the power of reason, but also in goodness. I would say that my faith is a faith on the border between pragmatism and idealism.

Zakhar ZARIPOV

I don't believe in anything. Science does not imply belief: there are facts, interpretations of facts (hypotheses), and generalizations with predictive power, confirmed experimentally (theories). Scientists can, of course, trust certain sources and authorities (so as not to have to double-check the entire body of scientific data), but only as long

as these agree with their observations, because “belief” and “trust” are very different things.

Vladimir KARA-MURZA

In God. In the fact that democracy in every instance is better than dictatorship. And, despite everything, in a free and civilized future for Russia.

Yan KATELEVSKY

I believe in people. It’s strange, of course, but having been behind bars in pre-trial detention for nearly four years, having shared a cell with different defendants, I still see humanity in them, even if it’s sometimes very poorly developed. I believe that they can make amends, that they should be given a chance and helped, not labeled and treated as social pariahs.

Vladislav KRAVAL

I believe in love, and I don’t believe in justice.

Marina MELIKHOVA

I believe that God has no hands, eyes, ears, or words other than human ones. I believe in the triumph of love, goodness and a just society.

Alexei NAVALNY

In God and science. I believe that we live in a non-deterministic universe and have free will. I believe that we are not alone in this universe. I believe that our deeds and actions will be evaluated. I believe in true love. I believe that Russia will be happy and free. And I don't believe in death.

Alexei NURIYEV

I am a Muslim by religion and I believe, of course, first of all, in the One God, and in the creation of man, endowed by Him with reason. I also believe in a bright future, freedom, peace, justice, and that after the darkest night there will be a long-awaited dawn.

Igor PASKAR

The question of faith has definitely been, is, and will remain an important one for me throughout my life. First and foremost because any answer is subject to doubt. Somewhere I found the definition of a worldview called “spiritual quest”. This is probably the most accurate definition of my faith. The other part of my outlook, a belief in the value of human life, is commonly referred to as “humanism.”

But the [Russian] state, which positions itself as a champion of traditional values, has defined my views as extremist and identified me as a terrorist.

Igor POKUSIN

In the power of the word and in my wife.

Vladimir SERGEYEV

I don't believe in anything. I merely suppose the probability [of this or that]. I'm not sure there is a God, just as I'm not sure there is no God. But if there is a God, he's not what the clergy make him out to be. He doesn't want us to build temples, fall on our knees, and print holy books. He created us out of boredom and wants us to entertain him. He likes it when we use our full potential, when we accomplish things on the edge of human possibility. That's the most fun for him. Or maybe he doesn't exist and we're just cosmic dust. I'm fine either way.

Vitaly TOROCHKOV

I believe in a future full of good people, not animals in human form. Everything will have been resolved and all of the Russian Federation's problems will have become

history, a history that people will study for a long time to come, and very carefully.

Nikita TUSHKANOV

I believe in law, order and love (although love may be illogical here). My belief in these things made me a member of the opposition, because those people who fill positions in all sorts of offices act like an organized crime group. But worst of all, they forbid (try to forbid) people to love each other in the broadest sense of the word, fostering hatred in them.

Natalia FILONOVA

I believe in people. I believe that words can change the world. There's a formula derived by Yuri Voronov, a poet who survived the Siege of Leningrad—it helped me just when I had to change jobs. I went from working with farm animals to working with small children. There were people who believed in me. But Voronov's poems saved my life. When I read the line “Well, it depends on you, then, which way the scales tip,” my fellow travelers had to make a choice in favor of the good...

Ilya YASHIN

I believe in goodness, in progress and, of course, in people. People are complicated and full of contradictions.

They are often wrong, and sometimes disappointing. But at the same time, it is people who inspire me, who give me strength and help me go forward. I love people.

3. WHAT DO YOU RELY ON WHEN MAKING THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISIONS? YOUR REASON OR YOUR GUT FEELING?

This question is important for every human being, and doubly so if he or she is a political prisoner. What brought the prisoner to prison? Was it primarily reason or primarily emotion?

Judging by the responses, the Russian political prisoner of 2023 is guided in important life decisions 29% by reason and 71% by gut feeling. Here are some responses that explain very well how this mechanism works. The moral law within us—like it or not—can send us to the poorhouse and to prison. But with it we can see the starry heavens above.

Vyacheslav ABRAMOV

If you take the last important decision I made, it was about what I'm here for. My reason told me that I would go to prison and suffer, but my gut feeling, my conscience, and my soul told me that it was no longer possible to live like this, to live with this, to see and understand what was happening and where we were going! I'd rather suffer, give it a try (what if I succeed:)) than regret all my life that I didn't even try, or rather, that I chickened out. It turns out that in this matter I relied on my gut!

Boris GONCHARENKO

On my gut feeling. I think that, in fact, there aren't many really difficult decisions in a person's life where they are faced with the problem of a choice. Most of the time, a person knows what they should do. One's gut feeling ("the moral law within me") in most cases provides an unambiguous answer to the question "What should I do?" The really hard choices almost always concern a "conflict of interest." In making any choice a person always has to sacrifice something. The challenge for a person is having enough will and determination to do the right thing. Man is

weak and subject to many temptations. Meanwhile, the choice is almost always obvious. But when faced with a really difficult choice, there's no unequivocally "right" decision. One's gut feeling may contradict immediate profit, convenience, and reason. For example, a man falls in love and does something stupid. But if it's true love, he won't blame himself too much, because it will be obvious to him that "I could not have done otherwise." In my opinion, one's gut feeling is more important than one's reason.

Antonina ZIMINA

When making the most important decisions, I always wonder if I won't be devoured by my inner tape worm, my conscience (I've always indulged that parasite). The worst is when you must choose between doing something stupid and something despicable. And then, completely aware, angry at yourself, you consciously do the stupid thing.

Yan KATELEVSKY

It's an interesting question (what do I rely on to make decisions), even an awkward one. Example. Mind: Are you crazy?! They'll either kill us or jail us if we go public with this investigative report. Look at who it exposes, the crooks at the very top! The whole thing puts my stomach in a knot.

But now another protagonist appears: Wait a minute. If nothing is done, these scoundrels will abuse your descendants and compatriots for a very long time. Look around you. Will anyone else do what you're doing? They tremble at the mere mention of fighting for their rights! Come on, help them and yourself, open their eyes, remove the blinders, dispel their fear of those in power. Burn! Now the mind changes horses and begins to support the inner provocateur. No matter what, you do what you have to, in the name of the future, a bright future, against filth and evil. Good must win. Period.

Alexei NAVALNY

There's no contradiction here; it's a false alternative. Evolution has designed us so that we don't have to think long and hard when we see a snake in our bed. Nor will we make instant decisions on how to build a house that snakes can't slither into.

There's a marvelous book about this called *Thinking, Fast and Slow* by Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman. I highly recommend it.

Sergei OZEROV

To say unequivocally what I rely on, my reason or a

gut feeling, is hard. When I make important decisions, I try to analyze, consider different options. But the main thing is that my actions not go against my conscience, especially recently. I made a decision that made my life worse, but my conscience is clear.

Ilya STARTSEV

In making the most important decisions, I rely on my whole self, as expressed in two of my favorite aphorisms: Miguel de Unamuno's "I think with feeling and I feel with thought" and Henri Bergson's "Think like a man of action, act like a man of thought."

Valentin KHOROSHENIN

I prefer to balance and consider each matter holistically, but if I have to choose, I will choose my gut feeling, because reason with its accompanying cold rationalism often goes against conscience.

4. WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU IN LIFE?

Clearly not personal and family well-being, as most non-prisoners would have responded. And indeed. For the most part, these are people who live in the interests of the Larger World. A small person, of course, can also wind up behind bars, but usually for something very mundane.

Dmitry GROMOVOY

The most important thing in life to me is life itself and what I manage to leave behind.

Andrei EDIGAREV

To me, the most important thing is the happiness of my loved ones, their health and well-being. All this is impossible without peace and harmony, respect for human rights, respect for nature and the planet Earth.

Mikhail ZHARIKOV

The most important thing in life to me globally is to live life in harmony with myself, not to betray myself, to be a Human Being. To learn more, to gain knowledge and omniscience, that is my personal goal. From a more “down-to-earth” perspective, I also care about the health and well-being of my family. And as a working goal, I want to become the best hockey analyst, commentator and historian. Talking about this game is not a job, it is my life’s work!

Boris KAGARLITSKY

There are so many important things in my life: my political activities; and my books; and people close to me; as well as animals. Everything and everyone is important.

Alexei NAVALNY

To be useful to society and remain a good person.

Alexander STRUKOV

To me, the main things in life are creativity and development, improving skills, learning new things, exploring the world around me. But because of events happening now in real time, my priorities have shifted. The main thing is for the war to end, because under current conditions neither the happiness of my family and friends, nor anything else, is possible. Now the main thing is to have peace.

Ilya YASHIN

The main things are freedom and justice. I believe that a person is born free. I believe that the task of the state and society is to help him to realize his freedom in creativity, in entrepreneurship, in serving people, in his personal life. Creating and guaranteeing to everyone opportunities for such self-realization: that, as I understand it, is justice.

To me personally, it is extremely important to feel an inner freedom and to strive for justice.

5. WHAT BRINGS YOU THE MOST JOY?

What kind of joy could exist in prison, in that zone of daily unhappiness?

It turns out there are quite a few people who have not lost the gift of joy even in their cell.

Alexander BAKHTIN

In prison, nothing. :(But on the outside, the feeling of being in love, I guess. :)

Andrei EDIGAREV

The laughter of my children and grandchildren, the happy eyes of my loved ones, the joy of fellowship.

Mikhail ZHARIKOV

What brings me joy? It seems to me that as you get older you come to realize what's most important. I'm convinced that happiness and joy are in the simplest things: in a new day, in the smiles of loved ones, in the mostly non-material things that give you inner harmony and spiritual catharsis.

Anton ZHUCHKOV

When you do people a good turn, and it's for the best.

Antonina ZIMINA

I'm happy when I have the chance to contemplate nature, when, during the senseless wait while standing in formation, I can look at the flowers and bees. In prison, I've turned my mind to small pleasures. Recently, I was happy to eat ice cream for the first time in five years; happy to get letters; happy at the chance to sit quietly by myself at night,

answering those letters while everyone else was asleep.

Konstantin KOCHANOV

What brings me the most joy is my child's smile and joy.

Alexander KRAICHIK

The feeling that I've made the world a better place. That I've done something useful, elicited a smile—things like that are incredibly valuable, far more valuable than people think.

Pavel KRISEVICH

My long confinement has made me realize that the greatest joy for me is when those around me are not standing still, but living their lives freely, filling their time with memories, achievements, etc. Maybe that's because I'm not living a full life myself right now. But if you only knew how heartening it is to hear from people that they finally wrote that article / traveled abroad / got married. It also reassures me that life on the outside hasn't stopped, and since it hasn't, I can still hope for freedom.

Alexei KURLOV

In places of isolation, the extensive list of pleasures is dramatically reduced. For example, my happiness now is in

receiving letters from family, from volunteers, a parcel or delivery, good news (not on TV), and quality literature.

Maxim LAVRENTIEV

My family and caring people who are not silent when they see what is happening in Russia.

Alexei NAVALNY

Simple family moments. Like going somewhere together in the car. One of us starts goofing around and singing, and the rest join in. And we can't stop until we've sung a bunch of songs. And the love and happiness overflow.

Sergei OZEROV

I never would have thought that utterly insignificant things could bring so much joy. When I was in Butyrka [Prison], I didn't see the sky or sun for over a year (our window faced a solid fence). Then they took me to court: when I got out of the van, I saw trees, leaves, sky—and my legs gave way. It is a great joy to hear the voices of family and friends. I haven't heard them in a long time. Any ordinary thing that we never noticed before can bring so many joyful feelings.

Timofei RUDENKO

When seeds of goodness sprout in lost souls.

Ruslan USHAKOV

Animal rescue; helping orphans; romance; dancing; substances; travel; freedom.

Ilya YASHIN

Creativity in the broadest sense of the word. I love to create things and I love it when others create things, putting their soul into it. I'm not religious, but I like the idea that God created man in his own image. And who is God? The Creator. So our purpose must be to create—and to do it with pleasure.

6. WHAT MOST SADDENS YOU?

This may be the most striking chapter. The answer would seem to be obvious: that I am here.

But no.

Dmitry GROMOVOY

What most saddens me, I find hard to define. But right now, in the moment, it saddens me that the world has gone mad and that brother nations are killing each other.

Andrei EDIGAREV

The lack of historical memory among my fellow citizens and, as a consequence, the horror of the situation in which my wretched country now finds itself.

Mikhail ZHARIKOV

What saddens me most is when lies triumph, when the majority, believing in their “plausibility”, dehumanize and disgrace themselves. It’s also very depressing that people are unwilling to think, to grow, to develop. People like that aren’t people, they’re consumers.

Konstantin ZELTSEV

People who pretend to be who they’re not; lies.

Konstantin KOCHANOV

I feel saddest when I’m unable to fulfill a promise made to my family.

Alexei NAVALNY

The unwillingness of many people to think; their incomprehension of basic cause-and-effect relationships. Every time someone says to me something like: “Corruption doesn’t affect my life” or “The people in power have done all their stealing, but if new people come to power, the stealing will start all over again,” I think: How is it that hundreds of millions of years of evolution have given this person the most amazing brain—and they don’t use it?

Alexei NURIYEV

What saddens me most of all is injustice. Why is the crown of creation—man—so helpless and pitiful in the face of the disasters and horrors that have befallen him? Also saddening is when people disguise their dark deeds with the loftiest words. Also our reality, a terrible reality with its crimes, inhumanity, hypocrisy, mendacity and equivocation.

Vladimir SERGEYEV

What saddens me most is that in times of war and upheaval many good people die. And the altruists die first. Perhaps my response is the result of a distortion of my

views by recent events, the so-called Special Military Operation [in Ukraine].

Andrei TROFIMOV

The death of my Motherland. I remember very well December 1991, when we buried the USSR. The Soviet Union died a natural death (old age has no cure), but it was still very sad, and at the funeral there were many good things to be said about the deceased. I will mourn Russia too (but her death will be terrible).

Nikita TUSHKANOV

What saddens me most is that justice is not always done before a person dies. As for me personally, it's my laziness. I'm the only one in my family with such terrible handwriting. Then again, laziness is the mother of invention. Without it there would be no progress. So I'm of two minds.

Ilya YASHIN

Here I'd like to quote Vysotsky. "I don't like it when they shoot you in the back" and "I can't stand it when innocent people are beaten." Simply put, I'm saddened by meanness and injustice.

7. WHAT, IN YOUR OPINION, BRINGS MAN AND MANKIND THE GREATEST EVIL?

This is a question that the ordinary person often does not know how to answer. The respondents to this “prison” questionnaire, who have personally confronted Evil, almost all answered this difficult question without hesitation.

Natalia VERKHOVA

Laziness. Not thinking, not doing, not striving—that's also laziness.

Dmitry GROMOVOY

In my opinion, the greatest evil to mankind is human stupidity; all the principal evils are its consequences.

Andrei EDIGAREV

Wars, of course, and criminal selfishness, and the irresponsibility of both the people who started the war and those witting and unwitting contributors to it.

Antonina ZIMINA

The greatest evil is brought by indifference, a lack of compassion. (Although here's the paradox: in camp, these two qualities, while eating away at your soul, help you to save yourself physically).

Pavel KRISEVICH

Well, I think it's the feeling that another person can be your slave. It brings evil to the person [who feels that way] in that it denies his human nature and also stops mankind from discovering its ever-increasing potential.

Because if a man is a slave, he won't be able to give most of his ideas to mankind unless his master lets him. Reading in Klyuchevsky [*A History of Russia*] about how serfdom was imposed on Muscovy fills me with disgust already on page two. That back then rights were worth less than a draught animal. But such is the course of history. Serfdom degenerated on its own, and in the 19th century we have more and more examples of famous artists who were bought out of serfdom, giving them and culture a future. But yes, the evil that sees a person as a piece of property is characteristic of today's State and of certain people. We still have to eradicate the very possibility and the idea that you can trample other people's rights.

Alexei NAVALNY

All it takes for evil to triumph is the inaction of good people. A phrase attributed to many, though no one knows exactly who said it (I checked). It is amazingly accurate. The hypocrisy of neutrality, "apoliticism," and recusal, concealing laziness, cowardice and meanness, is the main reason why a bunch of well-organized villains have ruled over millions throughout human history.

Karina TSURKAN

Lovelessness, in all its manifestations. And fear. The only thing worth being afraid of is fear. Fear of exposing one's weakness to others, one's vulnerability, gives rise to aggression. Between individuals and between nations.

Ilya YASHIN

Selfishness. But here there's a fine line. Ambition is, in my opinion, a positive and useful quality. Ambitious people often push human civilization forward, often stand at the forefront of social transformations, scientific discoveries and creative achievements. However, ambition and selfishness can turn imperceptibly into self-centeredness and devour a person from the inside, while bringing pain and sorrow to others.

How can this be prevented? From childhood, a person must be instilled with the values of humanism, empathy and mercy. Then their ambitions will develop in the right direction.

But if those ambitions grow out of cynicism, expect disaster. No one has brought more misery to mankind than ambitious cynics.

8. AND THE GREATEST BENEFIT?

Again a difficult question for the average person, but not for the political prisoner. To be imprisoned for one's beliefs, one must have a very clear idea not only of what begets evil, but of what makes the world a better place.

Andrei EDIGAREV

Citizen diplomacy; open and civilized relations; and, of course, respect for human rights.

Boris KAGARLITSKY

Benefit for whom? For the oppressors or the oppressed? For the exploiters or the exploited? Society is divided by interests. What matters is which side you're on. My principle is to be on the side of the exploited and often disenfranchised majority.

Yan KATELEVSKY

The greatest benefit is brought by creative people who make things, whether it's a nuclear reactor, a newspaper article, a sci-fi novel, a new movie, or a smartphone program. Individuality, autonomy, critical thinking, and self-expression are a benefit and a boon to the world.

Alexei NAVALNY

Engaging in the battle of good vs. neutral.

Lyudmila RAZUMOVA

Love. When a person has no love, he is poor spiritually, unhappy and evil. It is sad when a person like that lives in your neighborhood, and it's frightening when

people like that are in power. Without love there is no future, and therefore only love will save the world.

Olga SMIRNOVA

The benefit, or rather the prerequisite for any benefit, lies in the most ordinary honesty. It assumes an openness to new information, the easy reversal of unfortunate decisions, a readiness to recognize one's own lack of knowledge and capabilities. It assumes a search and respect for what was discovered earlier by other people, but also a willingness to relinquish those discoveries in favor of still others, without losing respect for the forerunners. Honesty opens up the possibility of loving what is far from perfect and of feeling a connection between all those who are alive and those who have died, without overestimating, but also without nullifying, one's own influence on them.

Alexander STRUKOV

Books. The ability to transmit information and its accessibility benefit mankind. The availability of knowledge prevents obscurantism and misconceptions. Another benefit to society is that every generation is succeeded by another. :) We can only hope that sooner or later everything will change, that barbarism and aggression

will recede into the past along with other archaisms of the modern age.

Natalia FILONOVA

Openness, the desire to join forces regardless of party affiliation, religion, or nationality. That was the slogan we proclaimed for almost two years here in the Republic of Buryatia, standing in front of the OM (Open Microphone), on Ulan-Ude's main square, Soviets' Square. Our naivety—the joy of communicating, arguing till our voices were hoarse, the desire among people of different ages, opinions, and experience to change the world—was like a little spark against a backdrop of gathering clouds. A little more pressure, and we could have parted those clouds with our hands.

Ilya YASHIN

Love. It is the foundation of everything in this world. The love of mother and child, the love of man and woman, brotherly love. Love in all its diversity forms the foundation on which everything rests. Atrocities and wars occur where there is a lack of love.

9. WHICH ART FORM HAS THE STRONGEST EFFECT ON YOU?

There are only a few choices here, and all of them predictable. Therefore, I will simply give statistics on the aesthetic preferences of Russian political prisoners in 2023.

Music was cited most often—34 responses

Then literature—21

Cinema—10

Fine Arts—9

Here are a few responses that depart from the course.

Felix ELISEYEV

Soviet poster art of the 1920s.

Konstantin KOCHANOV

I think I'm most affected by architecture.

Mikhail SIMONOV

Maybe ballet. I don't know, classical blues....

Andrei TROFIMOV

Poetry. I realized this only in prison, but quickly and clearly. I started my prison journey in solitary confinement. There are no TV sets in solitary confinement, but I didn't miss the movies. As it turned out, I could also do without books. But my favorite poems were so necessary that I wrote them out from memory on sheets of paper and decorated the walls of my cell with them (I didn't yet have any family photos). Poetry is an art form that does not require a material medium, but lives entirely in your head. Rarely can someone remember their favorite prose by heart, or draw a favorite picture from memory, or play a nocturne on their local window-grating flute. But to recite, write out or sing your favorite poems—easy as pie! My stock turned out to be quite large. First of all, my thanks to

Zinaida Nikolayevna Kulakova from Moscow School No. 201, who made us learn a lot by heart. From my school stock, Pushkin has come in handy in prison (“I Still Recall the Wondrous Moment”—I copied out that poem for my cellmate when he was composing a birthday greeting for his wife). Also Mayakovsky (especially during my hunger strike when I was about to “reincarnate as steamboats, as lines of writing, and other enduring things”). Secondly, my thanks to my mother, who instilled in me a love of bards’ songs.

I’ve even disseminated Vysotsky’s early “outlaw songs” here—I slipped them to some gangsters I knew in another cell to raise their general cultural level. On walks I’ve sung Okudzhava and Vizbor. And I had Galich (“It’s still the same, no simpler, our time is trying us...”) on a wall in my cell. Oy, here I go again! Stop me!

**10. DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE QUOTE OR
MAXIM? WHAT IS IT?**

A thought beautifully expressed by an eminent person has great power. Sometimes it comes to your aid in a moment of hesitation. Other times, on the contrary, it encourages you to make a mistake. Judging from which statements you consider to be true, one can guess what sort of person you are.

Natalia VERKHOVA

“One person is more than enough to change the world.”

Dmitry GROMOVOY

Favorite quotes: “The impossible is possible”; “That which does not kill us makes us stronger”; “I came, I saw, I conquered”; “The stronger man is not the one who didn’t fall, but the one who, having fallen, was able to get up”; “Man is mortal, and sometimes suddenly so.”

Felix ELISEYEV

“The state is an apparatus of violence and oppression of one class by another.”

Andrei IVASHEV

Do what the Holy Spirit tells you to do.

Vladimir KARA-MURZA

“In the end, the moral choice turns out to be the most pragmatic.” (Andrei Sakharov)

Konstantin KOCHANOV

My favorite quote is from Professor [Juri] Lotman: “Man is always in an unforeseen situation, and here he has two legs: conscience and intellect.”

Alexander KRAICHIK

[Franklin] Roosevelt: “This is a good time to have a beer.”

Mikhail KRIGER

I like very much Winston Churchill’s pronouncement: “Democracy is undoubtedly the worst form of government. But all the others are even worse...” (I’m quoting from memory, so apologize if I’ve slightly twisted it). The most interesting thing is that before discovering Churchill’s aphorism I had thought it was my own...))) I also try to be guided by the rule: “Do what you have to do, and if it works it works.” True, it doesn’t always work. I also like this rule: “Don’t ask what your country (America in the original) can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.”

Daniil KRINARI

A favorite quote, maxim or guide to action. There are, as we know, things that are temporary and things that are permanent. There’s an ideologeme that occurred to me when I was a student, but has really become relevant now: “You can take many things away, but not me from me.”

I hope that this truth will not always be the sole defining one of my life, that the temporary will give way to the permanent. For me, that permanent truth is a quote from Thomas Jefferson:

“The God, who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time: the hand of force may destroy, but cannot disjoin them.”

Pavel KRISEVICH

Rather than mangle the Latin, I’ll give you a translation: “Shining a light on others, I burn myself.” This has been my attitude since high school when in Social Studies we were asked to choose a Latin maxim that reflected us. I later used this maxim as my status on social networks—until I replaced it with all sorts of jokes and post-irony. But as a result, it’s the only maxim that I somehow remember and can identify with.

Yegor KUSONETS

“The world was created for good people, the bad ones will all disappear!” Zainuddin ibn Abdusaid.

Alexei NAVALNY

I don’t just have a favorite maxim. I have a favorite maxim that contains the word “maxim”: “Act in such a way

that the maxim of your action may become a rule of universal behavior.”

This is one of Kant’s formulations of the moral law.

It’s very similar to the famous “golden rule” in the Bible (“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”). The biblical version is more merciful; the Kantian version is, I think, more responsible, and I choose it.

Following any of these rules is very difficult, but it’s something one should strive for.

Roman NASRYEV

“Ask the dead the price of words, they’ll give you the answer...” the band E.S.T.

Pavel OLEYNIKOV

And the hundreds of misfortunes that have befallen us we will quietly hide behind our smiles.

Pyotr OPALNIK

“No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted” is a phrase from the Greek poet Aesop.

Alexander ORSHULEVICH

“Live as if Russia’s salvation depended on you

alone”—the words of a White general to his daughter.

Timofei RUDENKO

At this time, I’m particularly suited to the quote “*Lupus pilum mutat, non mentem*” (“A wolf can change his coat, but not his nature”). And also “*Zhashoonun chyndygygy үчүн кырәштө*” (“The meaning of life is in the fight for truth and justice”).

Mikhail SIMONOV

Without books, without the means to refresh a prison-clouded memory... Although, come to think of it—“Truth, for some reason, triumphs. For some reason, after the fact. But for some reason, it always does.” (Aleksandr Volodin) Or more topical: “In prison, like it or not, you have to sit.” (Sergei Dovlatov) I’m not sure I’ve got that exactly right.

Dmitry TALANTOV

“We’ve already won. It’s just not that noticeable yet.” (Boris Grebenshchikov).

Ruslan USHAKOV

“Better a day like a lion than a year like a sheep.”

Valentin KHOROSHENIN

“We all live under the same sky, but we don’t all have the same horizon,” as Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, said. Despite

our different views, we are all human beings, if not fellow citizens, and should be open to dialogue.

Karina TSURKAN

I guess so. A few years ago I borrowed a phrase from a book by Eugene Vodolazkin: “Go without fear.” It fit so harmoniously into the fascinating circumstances offered me by Divine Providence.

Ilya YASHIN

“Be realistic. Demand the impossible.” That was one of the main slogans of the student protests in Paris in 1968. To me, there is beauty in those words, and an aesthetic, and a very profound meaning.

**11. WHICH OF THE BOOKS YOU HAVE READ IS
THE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?**

This question was undoubtedly included because this questionnaire was composed by a writer. A musician would have asked: “What music is important to you?”— and the answers would probably have been even more various.

Zhenya BERKOVICH

If you mean an important book, then *The Road Goes into the Distance* by [Alexandra] Brushtein. If you're talking about serious literature, then *The Gift* [Nabokov] and *The Captain's Daughter* [Pushkin].

Andrei BOYARSHINOV

J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* as well as *The Game* by Neil Strauss.

Dmitry GROMOVOY

I find it hard to choose just one most important book, so I'll say the *Constitution of the Russian Federation*.

Mikhail ZHARIKOV

Those Burdened by Evil by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. This book had the maximum impact on me. There's something magical about it, alchemical even.

Boris KAGARLITSKY

Dozens, maybe hundreds of books. But if I have to name only a few, then I'll name Marx's *Capital*, Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and Hobbes's *Leviathan*.

Yuri KORNY

...The most important book to me is General A.I.

Denikin's *Russian Turmoil. Memoirs: Military, Social, and Political* (3 vols.). There's another book—not important to me, but valuable: S.S. Oldenburg's *The Last Tsar: Nicholas II, His Reign and His Russia*. It's not even a work book, but more for the soul. Although there's very little soul in it. As for Denikin's book, I managed to get it from the library in Lefortovo [prison]. Found it by chance. I didn't read it, I took notes. Much, unfortunately, was lost during my transfers from one prison to another. But I managed to hang onto some of my notes. I've kept them safe and sound for many years now. I refer to them whenever I need to write something....

Vladislav KRAVAL

The books that are important to me, I probably haven't read yet. But there are plenty of favorites, or ones that struck a nerve. The most recent being Ray Bradbury's *Dandelion Wine*. Such a sip of summer and childhood. I enjoyed every page in prison. What a marvelous book!

Alexei KURLOV

This will probably sound strange, but *The Captain's Daughter*. [Pushkin]

Maxim LYPKAN

Right now, it's Oscar Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*.

Alexei NAVALNY

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. When I read it—I was about 10 or 11—I realized that books could be not only boring and useful, but also impossible to put down and could make you laugh on every page. So I started reading. I always feel very sorry for people who don't read books. They probably never had the luck in childhood of having the right book fall into their hands.

Alexei NURIYEV

The Koran; books of the Holy Scripture. As for fiction, there are many books. I love to read. Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Arch of Triumph*; Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, *The First Circle*, and *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*—those are among the latest books I've read in prison. I especially like Kafka, Joyce, Beckett, Proust, Faulkner, Dostoevsky, Kuprin, Chekhov—and almost all the Russian classics. Silver Age and leaden age poetry. Of the modern poets, I like Boris Ryzhy. I could go on and on about books—endlessly.

Vladimir SERGEYEV

I've read my most important books in prison. "Ward No. 6", Chekhov's short story, is a parable of humanism. Its theme is not new, but there will never be enough of it. I

would also like to mention *Civilization: The West and the Rest* by popular historian Niall Ferguson. It's a book about the history of the emergence of social institutions and their adoption in different parts of the globe. It changed my ideas about the world and made a small but significant shift in my worldview. These books can't be compared—they're apples and oranges. And I can't choose between them.

Mikhail SIMONOV

There are just endless numbers of them!!! Unexpectedly, in prison, E. M. Remarque's *The Night in Lisbon* has seemed important.

Olga SMIRNOVA

There is no most important book, nor is there likely to be. But every book that has influenced me appeared by some miracle in my life at just the right moment. The most recent are *Lame Fate* and *The Final Circle of Paradise* by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. Two weeks before that I had reread [Bulgakov's] *The Master and Margarita* for the fourth time, because there was a waiting list for the other books. But this rereading turned out to be important, not only because our perceptions change with age, but because

Lame Fate is punctuated with references to Bulgakov's novel and even debates with it: there is "neither light, nor peace" by way of reward, whereas the creative person's nagging and gnawing dissatisfaction mixed with momentary discoveries of the exact facet of expression—*that* is happiness. I guess so.))

Maxim SMYSHLYAEV

Most recently, it's *11/22/63* by Stephen King. This book articulates very good values.

Andrei TROFIMOV

The most important book is the one that has changed your life. I have only one such book: where Akunin has Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*, I have Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island*. It is a hymn to human intelligence, friendship, peaceful labor, and the possibility, with the help of all this, of remaking the world. In elementary school, I fell in love with Cyrus Smith. I decided that I too would become an engineer, and lived in that paradigm for a decade and a half.

Nikita TUSHKANOV

Book: Viktor Remizov's *Permafrost* [Vechnaya merzlota]. I recommend it. No book has ever evoked such emotions in me as this one.

Alexander SHESTUN

Journey into the Whirlwind (Eugenia Ginzburg); *Les Misérables* (Hugo); *Dr. Zhivago* (Pasternak); the Bible.

Yegor SHTOVBA

The most important book I've read is Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. This book has contributed a lot to the formation of my views and values. Incidentally, they say it's popular in prison.

Ilya YASHIN

It's hard to single out one book. But if I have to choose just one, I'll choose *Hard to Be a God* by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. At one time, it was very important for me to realize that a progressor—trying to change an obscurantist society from within—runs the risk of becoming an obscurantist himself without even noticing it. This realization was not only philosophical, but also practical, because it saved me from major mistakes when I was tempted, out of noble intentions, to become part of a hostile system.

**12. IS THERE A PERSON, PAST OR PRESENT,
WHOM YOU CONSIDER A ROLE MODEL?**

A very interesting section. What follows is just a sampling. The full list is even more various. But many said that they would not make unto themselves an idol. A natural reaction for a political prisoner in a state with a Leader.

Alexander BAKHTIN

I have no role model (since “thou shalt not make unto thee an idol” :)). But I respect Jesus Christ, Buddha, Leonardo da Vinci, and even Nestor Makhno (somewhat :)). And among the ostensibly real, I respect Don Juan Matusa (from Castaneda’s books), and Väinämöinen (from the epic *Kalevala*).

Andrei BOYARSHINOV

Yes, of course. I have many such role models. For example: Russian general Vladimir Oskarovich Kappel, commander of the People’s Army of Komuch during the Russian Civil War.

Dmitry GROMOVOY

There are probably many people from whom one might borrow a character trait, a particular quality, a behavioral style, etc., but the person who could be considered a role model does not exist. In this matter, I am of the opinion that “thou shalt not make unto thee an idol.”

Andrei EDIGAREV

Yuri Yulianovich Shevchuk [DDT rock band].

Felix ELISEYEV

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin).

Anton ZHUCHKOV

Keanu Reeves.

Konstantin ZELTSEV

Yes. Basketball player Michael Jordan and my father.

Andrei IVASHEV

Lev Tolstoy (Count).

Vladimir KARA-MURZA

Boris Nemtsov.

Mikhail KRIGER

My role models include Janusz Korczak, greatest of heroes. And Giordano Bruno. And now Alexei Navalny, of course. Despite my skepticism about Navalny's possible methods of government. There are also people in my circle whom I consider saints, literally. I am very happy to know them. Incidentally, Yelena Kostyuchenko, Yelena Milashina, Anna Politkovskaya, and Natalia Estemirova are all great role models. I would say the same about Dmitry Muratov and Igor Kalyanin. And those are just the ones that come to mind right off the bat.

Maxim LAVRENTIEV

Mikheil Saakashvili.

Vasily MELNIKOV

There are anti-heroes whom I would not want to be: Puchkov (a.k.a. Goblin); Anatoly Shariy; Vladimir Solovyov; Maria Zakharova; Vasily Nebenzya; Yuri Podolyaka; Konstantin Ernst; Stas Vasilyev; Stalin; last year's Yevgeny Petrosyan; Oleg Gazmanov, etc.

Alexei NAVALNY

There were and are so many good people—brave, great, kind, and intelligent—that to choose just one person would be to rob yourself.

Alexei NURIYEV

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and, of course, my parents, who always support me no matter what happens.

Maxim SMYSHLYAEV

A few years ago, in the camp library, I found a biography of [Russian revolutionary] Nikolai Morozov. I was astounded by his self-sacrifice, his force of will, and his productivity in many fields of science.

Andrei TROFIMOV

I have lots of role models. For example: Afanasy Nikitin, [the 15th century traveler from Tver]. He too liked to sail down the Volga on a longship. To him, it was impor-

tant not just to be the first European to reach India, but to write a book about it. Nikolai Kibalchich, [the 19th century Russian revolutionary], was also held in solitary confinement; there he thought not about his impending execution, but about the possibility of human flight on a rocket. [Russian and Soviet rocket scientist] Konstantin Tsiolkovsky also taught school in the Kaluga province (where, like me, he tried to teach silly maidens math) and published strange texts for no royalties. His idea was that man, having penetrated the cosmos, would change biologically (so as to be able to live there, not just visit)—and this would be more important than his rocket equation.

Ilya YASHIN

My role model is Konrad Adenauer. He was a German politician, the mayor of Cologne. After the Nazis came to power in Germany, he did not join them, did not run away, and did not shut up. He protested openly and consistently. For example, during Hitler's visit to Cologne, Adenauer refused to meet him at the airport (as required by protocol) and forbade the display of swastika flags in the streets. Naturally, he was arrested by the Gestapo.

When the Nazi regime suffered military defeat and collapsed, Adenauer became the first leader of a democratic Germany and rebuilt his country from the ruins, lay-

ing the foundations of a free and just state.

I have great respect for the road traveled by Adenauer and feel a spiritual affinity with the man.

13. WHAT IS RUSSIA TO YOU TODAY?

Many of those who have yet to receive a sentence chose not to answer this question, which is probably right.

But most respondents did supply an answer.

A lot can be said (and is said) about Russia, but one thing cannot be taken away from the country. It evokes very strong feelings in everyone.

Daniil BERDYUGIN

Today, to me, as to all of us, Russia is the Motherland. People die, but the Motherland remains.

Andrei BOYARSHINOV

The Evil Empire, or just the Empire Manqué. It can also be described as the core of a not completely decayed Russian Empire. The core is still alive, and thawing.

Natalia VERKHOVA

To me today, Russia is a flower at the budding stage. Many people feel the power of the beauty, fragrance, and light emanating from this flower. History knows a lot about this flower: both its successful blooms and its dying buds. Today there's not only the sense of a bud forming, but also the anticipation of being part of the coming bloom.

Dmitry GROMOVOY

What is Russia to me today? To me today Russia is a long-suffering Mother, who has been taken hostage by a gang of tyrants. They are ruthlessly exploiting her, using her richest resources to achieve their personal ends, keeping her in fear, and blackmailing her with the destruction of her children—the people of Russia.

Andrei EDIGAREV

Russia to me today is an enormous sadness and a nagging wound. It's a society that doesn't exist; people have withdrawn into themselves; they don't want to know anything or be responsible for anything. Their callousness and bitterness is astonishing. Yet I'm sure that they can be happy, open, kind, and hospitable. True, for that they will have to go through a painful process of purification.

Mikhail ZHARIKOV

To me, Russia today is like Doctor Budach, that character in the Strugatskys' *Hard to Be a God*. Budach wanders and searches, seeking enlightenment in a dark, stuffy space, reaching for the light. For now, he is alone in his quest. A persistent allegory is the navigator who has drifted off course and lost his bearings in the monotonous flow. Still I hope that, even though he has lost his bearings, he will defy historical stereotypes and reach the shores of a new Earth, the land of the future, where everyone finds what they are looking for, where Goodness and Love dwell in and guide everyone, and we will have peace and tranquility.

Anton ZHUCHKOV

To me, Russia is a prison.

Konstantin ZELTSEV

A great, mighty power! A developing country!

Andrei IVASHEV

A crab. An aquatic arthropod that lives in fresh water, moving rapidly backwards into the “the future.” Its body has a chitinous shell.

Boris KAGARLITSKY

Russia to me today is what it was yesterday. The country where I have lived all my life and for whose future I work.

Vladimir KARA-MURZA

A beautiful, talented, beloved country now under the rule of scoundrels. But we will—I believe—correct that.

Konstantin KOCHANOV

To me, Russia is my homeland, which I love, where I was born and grew up, and for which I wish a better future and the correction of past mistakes.

Vladislav KRAVAL

What is Russia to me today? My Russia is sitting in prison. Russia is drones, camouflage nets and trench candles. Unfortunately.

Mikhail KRIGER

Unfortunately, today it's the "Evil Empire" all over again. Something like the Third Reich. Run by the same sort of Führer. I'm also reminded of stories like "The Monster Cockroach" by Kornei Chukovsky. The atmosphere is like that in my favorite movie, "To Kill a Dragon" (based on the play by Evgeny Schwartz). A time of triumphant meanness.

Alexei KURLOV

Now it's just a GULAG.

Yegor KUSONETS

If I answer this question here, I'll have a hard time. So to me today, Russia is a country. I'll let you figure out the rest.

Maxim LYPKAN

A huge, potentially free country with a great future.

Evgenia MAKARENKO

Russia is the country where I was born. It is beautiful nature, which is being destroyed and sold off; beautiful rivers, lakes and streams, which are being polluted. It is a country where talented, extraordinary, unusual, unconventional people who stand out and want freedom of expression are imprisoned for something they did not do. It's a place of fear, of pain, and a fluttering "rose-colored

dream.” It’s a huge number of addicts, alcoholics, lonely people, and people who “live” at work in order to live. It’s a place that people criticize, while forgetting that they should start with themselves. Be the Desmond Doss of their time. It’s a place about which there are many songs, tales, and stories. A place where everyone feels that ineffable Russian longing. It’s an infinite land with a childish Generation Next.

Marina MELIKHOVA

My homeland is the Soviet Union. I’m happy that I had a Soviet upbringing and education. The Russian Federation is alien to me with its bestial capitalism, and totalitarian capitalism, and totalitarian regime. It is the depths; it is lies upon lies. It is aggression and violence. I believe in the rebirth of Russia and the coming of a Golden Age.

Vasily MELNIKOV

Today [Russia] is the Nutcracker, who’s bewitched and can’t do anything about the Rat, but the ballet must be performed for the whole kingdom.

Vladlen MENSHIKOV

Russia is my homeland, the place where I was born and grew up, a place of great expanses and opportunities. To build new cities and improve public spaces. Meanwhile,

an adequate minimum wage, a fair distribution of resources, the right values, peace, friendship, love and humor will save us from everything negative.

Let's hope and believe in better things to come.

Alexei NAVALNY

A place where I understand everyone and feel at home. A country where my language is spoken and my people live.

I'm able to separate the country from the government, so in these dramatic times I love Russia no less than I always have.

Alexei NURIYEV

Russia is my Motherland, a Motherland that today is ill, but which, I believe, will be cured, will recover, get back on her feet and flourish.

Pyotr OPALNIK

Although I was born and grew up in Ukraine, today, despite everything that is happening, Russia to me is like a second homeland. Here I have my beloved wife, Irochka. Together we're building a strong family; we've started to

build a house and are bringing up our children. I believe and know that soon I'll return from here and we'll go on with everything that we started and haven't yet had time to finish. Everything will be fine!

Igor POKUSIN

I'd better keep quiet; my sentence is still to come.

Timofei RUDENKO

I can't answer this question in any politically correct way. Even carefully chosen words will be interpreted aggressively when this letter is checked. In my years of living under the current regime, I've become sincerely convinced that the only way to reach apolitical members of Russian society is the way in the parable about Moses, who led the Jews through the desert for 40 years, until all those who had the desire to be slaves in their genes and blood died out and only those who were born truly free people, not enslaved by anyone, were left. (See the Book of Exodus.)

Ildar SADRIYEV

I love Russia. To me, Russia is my home. And, as with any home, one sometimes has to make repairs and get rid of the parasites.

Ivan SAFRONOV

“An oak is a tree. A rose is a flower. A deer is an animal. A sparrow is a bird. Russia is our fatherland. Death is inevitable.” [Nabokov’s epigraph for *The Gift*]

Vladimir SERGEYEV

Russia today is like ancient Persia, beating the sea with whips. An enemy of civilization.

Alexander STRUKOV

To me, “Russia today” is something that will cease to exist one way or another. Playing on imperial ambitions, militarism, and hatred of one’s neighbors won’t work for long. I hope people are tired of war. An empire is not a viable structure of state organization. If we mean to develop, we must abandon the ancient vestiges, the maniacal desire to drag Russia back into the archaic past. *Change* is inherent in the evolution of living things, yet we are being asked to harden ourselves, to promote an antediluvian dogmatism, to embrace obsolete traditions from the ancient past, and to impose barbarism and fanaticism. German society has developed an immunity to fascism and a certain sense of shame about its past. We too will have to go through that. A sense of guilt, like that of

the cat that has made a mess in the living room, is vital for us. Our nation has been indoctrinated for too long in the “rightness” of what is happening and in Russia’s special path.

Moreover, I assume that in the future there will be no borders as such and no states. Man, as a citizen of the world, is an inhabitant of the planet Earth. Free from dogmas and stereotypes, playfully exploring the world around him, which is not limited to the planet.

Dmitry TALANTOV

Today it’s pain. Only pain.

Vitaly TOROCHKOV

Russia today is a great calamity for everyone. We must stop this calamity and solve all our problems. Not as always, but for always.

Andrei TROFIMOV

Today, Russia is my prison, the homeland of Putin, of my investigators, judges, and guards. If and when I get out of here, my first personal task will be to get the people I care about out of here. (See also my answer to question No. 6.)

Nikita TUSHKANOV

Today, to me, Russia is people. Like millions of people, I was forced out of my country, turned into an emigrant, yet I haven’t gone anywhere. It’s like in that

song by the punk group Pornofilm: “My Russia is sitting in prison...” In this emigration we’ve found something more than a country, we’ve found a homeland. (At least I have.) That part which instils hope for a rebirth. But as a country, I consider that Russia has been invaded, or at least gripped, by delusions of fascism. We are, as Yuri Shevchuk put it, “captives in our own land.” But we’ll break out of that captivity. And once we’ve won our Freedom, we won’t give it back so easily.

Natalia FILONOVA

Russia must get over its enchantment, shake off the spell that has been cast, and return to the sources of morality. Russia doesn’t realize that it has lost its way; it ignores the brutality that has proliferated and the destruction of civil rights. Not out of spite, but out of some habit of tolerating, of keeping silent, and bearing misfortune and sorrow. There’s a lack of joy, of openness, of awareness of the importance of action and movement. Russia should not be a huge prison. We need change—the winds of change of Gorbachev’s perestroika and free elections! And faith in people. As we used to sing: “Faith in people, faith in people is our main weapon!”

Valentin KHOROSHENIN

Russia is my Motherland, which I love and sincerely wish the best. My Motherland has strayed from the path of humanism, democracy and modernization; this is due not to cultural determinism, but to political will. Despite this, my Motherland is still my Motherland.

Alexander SHESTUN

It's no coincidence that this question is No. 13. Russia to me is enormous pain. A police state with a slave population. But there are some real heroes.

Yegor SHTOVBA

Russia to me today is the same as it has always been. There's a difference between the government and the people. I love Russia. I have a strong emotional attachment to home, but everything that's happening makes me a hopeless pessimist. "No comment," as the greats say.

Ilya YASHIN

I think of present-day Russia as a person who is close to me, but also gravely ill. Obviously, when a person is ill and in pain, it's hard to talk to them. They scream, they're

hard to bear; they may become delirious; they may insult or even hit someone who is trying to help. But you can't abandon those dear to you when they're unwell. You have to be patient and not take offense and try to cure them. When the person recovers, they will thank you. And the Motherland, too, when she recovers, will embrace you with gratitude, and not "kick you with a boot."

Part Two
THE
RESPONDENTS

Vyacheslav Yurievich ABRAMOV (b. 1986)



Lived in St. Petersburg. Worked at a Magnit supermarket. The night of September 16, 2021, law enforcers searched Abramov's apartment, found stickers that said "Against Government," and detained him. He belonged to a Telegram group chat, "What Is to Be Done!", whose members were urged to participate in protests. Abramov was accused of planning to disrupt the State Duma elections to be held on

September 17-19, 2021. He is one of 11 defendants from seven regions of Russia in the "What Is to Be Done!" case. They include: Alexei Kurlov (p. 225), Igor Nagibin (p.255), Ildar Sadriyev (p.297) and Alexei Yanochkin (p. 388). All have been charged under Articles 212 ("instigation of mass riots") and 282 ("incitement to hatred by an organized group") of the Russian Criminal Code.

Vyacheslav Abramov, who spent several years in prison a decade ago, has pleaded guilty.

Hello, Grigory! Thank you for your letter and your position! My name is Vyacheslav, it will be my pleasure to answer your questions. :)

AUTO-GRAPH

1. I'm an ordinary guy, kind and modest. An honest son of the Motherland!

2. I believe that God will not abandon our country, our people! I believe in people. I believe that soon we will wake up. I believe in goodness and justice.

3. If you take the last important decision I made, it was about what I'm here for. My reason told me that I would go to prison and suffer, but my gut feeling, my conscience, and my soul told me that it was no longer possible to live like this, to live with this, to see and understand what was happening and where we were going! I'd rather suffer, give it a try (what if I succeed :)) than regret all my life that I didn't even try, or rather, that I chickened out. It turns out that in this matter I relied on my gut!

4. To me, the main thing in life is to remain a human being, not to break, not to bend, to travel one's road with dignity!

5. In my situation now, any little thing brings me joy. Letters warm my soul.

6. People's cowardice and indifference sadden me. Indifference is worse than betrayal. It saddens me that we are sick with fear.

7. Political hypocrisy; money; lust for profit.

8. Undoubtedly, Faith, Hope, and Love!

9. Music, of course, the music of today. There's a rap poet called Rustaveli. Highly recommended.

10. There are many good quotes. For every occasion in life. The one that's relevant to me at the moment is: "Believe not. Fear not. Ask not."

11. I can't cite one most important book. I read your novel *The Fiery Finger* the other day and loved it. :)

12. My role models are our grandfathers who fought to the death [in World War II] for our future!

13. That's a sore subject... But I fervently believe that things will change!

With best regards,

Vyacheslav Abramov!

Prisoner of conscience!

Alexander Sergeyevich BAKHTIN (b. 1971)



Musician; animal rights activist. In March 2022, Bakhtin published three anti-war posts on social media about a possible blockade of Kyiv; the killing of civilians in Bucha; and Ukrainian volunteers risking their lives to save animals. A year later he was arrested in his hometown of Mytishchi, a suburb of Moscow, on charges of “disseminating false information about the Russian Armed Forces on grounds of political hatred” (Article 207.3 of the Russian Criminal Code).

At his trial, in August 2023, his 79-year-old mother Lyudmila told the court: “My son is a pacifist. He is against the war. So am I. You can arrest me too.” By then Bakhtin was one of over 20,000 people (according to OVD-Info) detained in Russia for protesting against Putin’s invasion of Ukraine. To the judge, he said: “According to the presumption of innocence, I should not have to prove that the materials I published are true, rather the prosecution should have to prove that these materials are ‘knowingly false information’... My goal was to make my modest contribution to stopping this war, since, for example, I believe that the First Chechen War was stopped in 1996 largely due to Russian society’s negative attitude towards it.” He also said that his idea of justice would be “Putin behind bars.”

Alexander Bakhtin was sentenced to six years in a penal colony and compulsory outpatient treatment by a psychiatrist.

1. I am me (any other answer would be inaccurate. :))

2. I believe in the forces of good (speaking in religious terms), also that we will defeat Putinism (and sooner than many people think...).

3. On both reason and my gut feeling—it all depends. (I can't say which I rely on more. :))

4. Probably, “finding the Truth.”

5. In prison, nothing. :(But on the outside, the feeling of being in love, I guess. :)

6. Disappointment. :(Especially if powers turn out in fact to be... weaknesses. :(

7. Man himself and mankind itself. :(

8. I can only answer for myself here... Probably a creative approach (in everything, that is, even spiritual self-development).

9. I'm a professional musician, so music, of course. :) But also movies, painting, poetry, science fiction (etc.).

10. “Today” I might mention one quote, “yesterday” another. It's hard to choose, so... I will just cite one of them here. :) It's a refinement of the ancient Roman saying *tertium non datur* [no third [possibility] is given], which too often forces us to choose between two... evils. So, of course: “No third possibility is given. People take the third *themselves*,” i.e. the right decision is not to choose, but to *find*. This relates to the theme of the movie

“Ender’s Game,” the scene where Ender plays a video game (“the mouse and the Lord”).

11. One book is also hard to choose (and it depends on the stage of life). As a child, fairy tales by Alexander Volkov, *Kalevala*, then *The Gadget* (E. L. Voynich), *Doctor Faustus* (Thomas Mann), books by Carlos Castaneda, and *Apocrypha of the Ancient Christians*—that’s just what I remember off the top of my head. :) But as for songs, I can definitely choose one: “*El pueblo unido jamás será vencido*” (which I heard back in 1975 performed by Inti-Illimani or Quilapayún). :)

12. I have no role model (since “thou shalt not make unto thee an idol” :)). But I respect Jesus Christ, Buddha, Leonardo da Vinci, and even Nestor Makhno (somewhat :)). And of ostensibly real people, I respect Don Juan Matusa (from Castaneda’s books) and Väinämöinen (*Kalevala*).

13. Today’s Russia for me is [censored]. (“Well, you understand...” :) (Although I’ll still try to transmit my answer to question No. 13 through my lawyer. :))

With best regards,

Alexei Bakhtin

Oleg Vasilyevich BELOUSOV (b. 1967)



Lived in St. Petersburg. Urban archaeologist who has a disability; is raising a son with special needs. Oleg Belousov belonged to an online group chat for local treasure hunters (Peter's Diggers). In that chat, Belousov said Putin was "traitor Number One, plunderer of Russia, and a war criminal." His comments were evidently reported to the authorities. On June 27, 2022, law enforc-

ers ripped out the steel door to Belousov's apartment and conducted a search. The next day Belousov was sent to pre-trial detention on charges of "discrediting the Russian Armed Forces" (Article 207.3 of the Russian Criminal Code). He was later additionally charged with "incitement to extremism" (Article 280). The second case was brought on the basis of another comment on social media, which, the investigation claimed, contained "indications of accusations against a person holding public office."

At his trial, Belousov told the court: "I'm from a family that survived the Siege of Leningrad [by Nazi Germany, 1941-44]... I was brought up to dislike aggression and lies... I'm against the war and the destruction of cities... I don't believe my actions constitute crimes. I ask you to acquit."

On March 29, 2023, Oleg Belousov was sentenced to 5.5. years in a general-regime penal colony.

1. I'm an ordinary person who has never done anyone any harm, who has never wished anyone any harm; with-

out militaristic or imperial ambitions; living my life of small pleasures.

2. I believe that good will prevail.

3. When I make decisions, some are spontaneous, and some require a lot of thought and consultation.

4. The most important thing in my life is my mother, who died in October 2020, she is in my heart; my nearest and dearest; my son; my friends; the city where I was born and grew up—Leningrad, St. Petersburg. And now also everyone who supports me, everyone who cares about the future of our country and our children.

5. What brings me joy... I'm happy when all is well with my family and friends.

6. I'm saddened when they are ill. I'm very worried about the civilians who are dying, whose lives are being ruined, who are being deprived of homes and property it took them years to acquire, and who were already living from paycheck to paycheck.

7. Evil came to Ukraine; evil came to my home and broke down the door. Today. Who will be next tomorrow?

8. Russia could be truly great if it took care of the welfare of its population, but...

9. –

10. As for a favorite phrase... At the moment, it's "Good must prevail!"

11. I read a lot of books as a kid, now I also read whatever I can get at the [prison] library. I get a lot of letters. :) So I write a lot, answering every one. :)

12. I have no role model. You have to remain yourself, but I would gladly vote for Alexei Navalny. :)

13. Russia to me is my homeland, the place where I was born and where I live. I'm not going to leave. I would like to see change, an end to this madness and bloodshed! I would like to see young and sane people in the government, not old people out of their minds.

Good must prevail! The first casualty of war is truth. I don't have the magical voice of [Rodari's] Gelsomino, but I hope my voice will be heard.

Daniil Alexandrovich BERDYUGIN (b. 2003)



Lived in Novosibirsk. Was in his second year at a Novosibirsk medical college. On October 20, 2022, Daniil set off from home not for college, but for Moscow. With him he had his white coat, nursing diploma, passport and laptop. He told his parents that he had decided to go to the front to help the wounded. Four days later, an FSB official turned up at the Berdyugins' apartment: their 19-year-old son had been detained at

the train station in Kursk (50 miles from the Ukrainian border). Daniil's mother was privately relieved. She thought that now her son, after a dressing-down, would be sent home. Instead, he was charged with "preparing an act of treason" (Article 275 of the Russian Criminal Code) and "attempting to cross the border illegally" (Article 322).

In addition to his studies, Daniil was interested in learning foreign languages (German and Japanese) and online games. In the course of one game, he met a girl from Ukraine; they started corresponding in German and became friends. Daniil may have set off to see her. According to the investigation, he intended to "go over to the enemy's side, but did not manage to do so due to circumstances beyond his control."

On August 3, 2023, Daniil Berdyugin was sentenced to six years in a strict-regime penal colony.

To Akunin, a hello and a reply.

1. A political prisoner.
2. I believe in the pattern and consequence of actions and outcomes.
3. On my gut feeling, unfortunately.
4. Staying in contact with my family and friends; their support.
5. Answer No. 4.
6. People's despondency, their deception...
7. People, people themselves.
8. Faith in people.
9. Music.
10. —
11. There are lots of books, but they're not that important.
12. Any motivated person who achieves everything they want.
13. Today, to me, as to all of us, Russia is the Motherland. People pass away, but the Motherland remains.

Evgenia Borisovna BERKOVICH (b. 1985)



Moscow theater director, playwright, popular anti-war poet. In 2021, Evgenia (Zhenya) Berkovich staged “Finist, the Brave Falcon” — a documentary-style play by Svetlana Petriychuk (see p. 283). “Finist” tells the story of Russian women lured by radical Islamists into marriage and life in Syria, then prosecuted upon their return for “aiding and abetting terrorism.”

In 2022 Berkovich and Petriychuk’s production won a Golden Mask (Russia’s premier theater award). On May 4, 2023, Berkovich and Petriychuk were detained and sent to Lefortovo. They were later charged with “publicly justifying terrorism” (Article 205.2 of the Russian Criminal Code) in “Finist, the Brave Falcon”.

The case against Berkovich and Petriychuk is based on the “expertise” of “destructology” inventor Roman Silantiev. He found they had “glorified” ISIS militants and promoted “the ideology of radical feminism.” Meanwhile, film and theater critic Anton Dolin called their arrest “an acknowledgement of the power and danger that poetry and theater pose to a repressive system.”

Zhenya Berkovich faces up to seven years in prison.

Dear Grigory Shalvovich, Thank you very much for your important kind words! This morning my cellmate told me that prison guard N. can’t stand me; she scolded me in every possible way. Then I received your message, and it instantly became a little less important how this unpleasant man in uniform treats me!)

I'll try to answer your questionnaire. There isn't much space, and my brain is rotten after four months in prison, so I apologize in advance.

1. I'm Zhenya Berkovich. Nowadays it's crucial that I not define myself as belonging to any group: theater director, prisoner, mother, feminist, poet, etc. The important thing is that I am just me.

2. I believe that no one is born a scoundrel, that at heart everyone wants to be good. And under certain conditions, they can be. Everyone.

3. On my mind's gut feeling. That is, I still rely on my reason. Try to.

4. The most important thing in life now is to maintain a healthy state of mind and not to lose hope.

5, 6. It is a joy to see good, genuine things in people, often where you never expected them. I'm saddened by the impossibility of darkness and quiet [in my cell]. It's hard...

7, 8. I can't answer briefly, sorry. I don't know...

9. Literature of all kinds (except non-fiction). And movie trailers!

10. —

11. If you mean an important book, then [Alexandra] Brushtein's *The Road Goes into the Distance*. If you're talking about serious literature, then *The Gift* [Nabokov] and *The Captain's Daughter* [Pushkin].

12. Many people and no one.

13. Russia is what I am made up of, but it is also made up of me. I'm not at all a "citizen of the world", alas (or hurrah). Right now, perhaps, it's alas....

Andrei Vladimirovich BOYARSHINOV
(b. 1984)



Lived in Kazan. Holds a PhD in biology; taught at Kazan Federal University. Civil activist; supporter of Alexei Navalny. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Boyarshinov created two group chats on Telegram (Protest Kazan: NoWar and ProtestChat/ Kazan). On March 17, 2022, the apartments of nine Kazan politicians and activists were searched in connection with a criminal case (“instigation

of mass riots”, Article 212 of the Russian Criminal Code). The searches were prompted by posts in a Telegram chat about the need to buy megaphones and means of armed resistance. Boyarshinov said that the law enforcers who searched his home used violence, insulted and blackmailed him. One officer said that if Boyarshinov did not give them his phone, they would strip his mother naked.

Two days later, on March 19, 2022, the charge against Boyarshinov was changed to “justification of and incitement to terrorism” (Article 205.2, punishable by up to seven years in prison) based on several comments posted on his Telegram chats. For example, on March 4 someone had written: “This is an example of how to act now! A true patriot.” This comment appeared in response to the news that in Moscow a man had thrown two Molotov cocktails at the Kremlin wall and scattered “opposition leaflets” protesting against the war in Ukraine.

Boyarshinov has said that he did not write the comments attributed to him. He has also said that he was, is, and will always be against the war in Ukraine.

Here are my answers to Akunin's AUTO-GRAPH questionnaire.

1. Creative, kind, lazy, gentle.
2. I believe in the Universe and its principal law—the Law of Attraction.
3. I rely on both: it's a 50/50 split.
4. Creative self-realization and personal Happiness.
5. Creative successes and achievements.
6. Injustice and deceit.
7. The seven deadly sins and the weakness of human nature, as well as will-lessness and weakness of character.
8. Honesty, sincerity, openness.
9. Theater and music.
10. "Do what you must, and come what may!"
11. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* as well as *The Game* by Neil Strauss.

12. Yes, of course. I have many such role models. For example: Russian general Vladimir Oskarovich Kappel, commander of the People's Army of Komuch during the Russian Civil War.

13. The Evil Empire, or just the Empire Manqué. It can also be described as the core of a not yet completely decayed Russian Empire. The core is still alive, and thawing.

Thank you and Boris Akunin for this questionnaire and for your words of encouragement to me (among others).

Natalia Dmitrievna VERKHOVA (b. 1969)



Lived in St. Petersburg. Entrepreneur and top manager turned human rights activist. Charged in 2018 with “fraud” (Article 159 of the Russian Criminal Code), Verkhova spent 22 months in pre-trial detention without her case going to trial. She was released on her own recognizance in 2020, by which time her business was on the way out. Natalia Verkhova decided to change professions and become an

advocate for the rights of Russian prisoners. Within the framework of Soft Power (a socio-political coalition co-founded by Yulia Galyamina), Verkhova organized a working group on human rights. She also wrote a book called Prison Happiness and a handbook called We’re Going to Prison.

On February 6, 2023, Natalia Verkhova was sentenced to eight years in a general-regime penal colony, minus the time spent in pre-trial detention. (At an earlier hearing she had been told that if she confessed her “guilt”, she would get only three years.)

Letter for Grigory Shalvovich. Your appearance in this wonderful mailing made me very happy. Here are my answers to your questions.

1. I’m a free person, and this freedom does not depend in any way on external circumstances.
2. In the higher meaning of all that happens.

3. On an inner sense of truth.
4. The light in a person's eyes.
5. When I manage to help someone.
6. People's unwillingness to evolve.
7. Laziness. Not thinking, not doing, not striving—
which is also laziness.
8. Mercy.
9. Music.
10. "One person is more than enough to change the
world."
11. Irina Izmailova's *Cathedral* (about St. Petersburg, history, St. Isaac's Cathedral and Montferrand).
12. Mikhail Speransky.
13. To me today, Russia is a flower at the budding stage. Many people feel the power of the beauty, fragrance, and light emanating from this flower. History knows a lot about this flower: both its successful blooms and its dying buds. Today there's not only the sense of a bud forming, but also the anticipation of being part of the coming bloom.

And here, if I may, are a few counter-questions.

– To what extent does the inertness of a person’s worldview depend on their standard of living? Does the rate of change in a person’s attitudes always lag behind the rate of growth of their prosperity?

Of course, Natalia Dmitrievna. I’ll try to answer. A quick mind, a desire and ability to evolve are directly related to success in life. As for the speed of change in a person’s attitudes, the quality of those attitudes is more important than the speed. Some views are so valuable as to be more important than prosperity and should not be changed. A person’s greatest good is their self-respect. G.Ch.

– Can the Russian habit of trusting to luck be cured only by foreign intervention, or do critical conditions work just as well?

Trusting to luck—if it’s a constructive adventurism—can be useful. I don’t see anything purely Russian in this quality. But a mature and intelligent person carefully doses this booster. Education, life experience, and a normal environment will help them find the right balance.

With that last factor, there are big problems in today's Russia. Foreign intervention cannot fix that factor. Only we can—on our own. G.Ch.

- Your prescription for curing irresponsibility?

The wages of sin. And then education can help. G.Ch.

- Your position on charitable giving?

Organizing charities is a profession. Participation in those charities is the duty of every self-respecting person. G.Ch.

- What form of punishment do you think is the most effective?

A punishment that is not demeaning, but which encourages a person to reform. G.Ch.

Boris Andreyevich GONCHARENKO (b. 1988)



Lived in Krasnodar Krai. Taught history and philosophy. According to the investigation, on the night of October 6, 2022, Boris Goncharenko and Bogdan Abdurakhmanov threw four Molotov cocktails at the door of a military enlistment office and fled. The resulting fire was put out by office staff before the fire brigade arrived. On October 7, the two men were detained. First they were charged with “attempted damage

of property by arson” (Article 167 and Article 30 of the Russian Criminal Code). Subsequently, the charges were reclassified as “commission of a terrorist act by a group of persons working in collusion” (Article 205, punishable by up to 20 years in prison). Goncharenko admits to preparing the combustible mixture, but says he did not take part in the arson. Video camera footage confirms this, according to his lawyer Felix Vertegel.

The investigation holds that the two men committed arson “because they disagreed with the Special Military Operation in Ukraine and the partial mobilization of Russian citizens; they wanted to put pressure on the Russian authorities to stop it.”

1. It’s hard to define oneself. Well, put it this way: by education, I’m a philosopher; by profession, a teacher and

lecturer. I'm also a staunch pacifist; and now I'm a detainee, one accused...

2. Faith is something that cannot be proved rationally, by reason. Therefore, I believe in the existence of some supreme Absolute (God); I believe in life after death (the immortality of the soul); I believe in human freedom (free will and freedom of choice). I also believe in Man and Humanity as a whole, in progress and development.

3. On my gut feeling. I think that, in fact, there aren't many really difficult decisions in a person's life where they are faced with the problem of a choice. In most cases, one knows what one should do. One's gut feeling ("the moral law within me") in most cases provides an unambiguous answer to the question "What should I do?" The really hard choices almost always concern a "conflict of interest." In making any choice a person always has to sacrifice something. The challenge for a person is having enough will and determination to do the right thing. Man is weak and subject to many temptations. Meanwhile, the choice is almost always obvious. But when faced with a really hard choice, there's no unequivocally "right" decision. One's

gut feeling may contradict immediate profit, convenience, or reason. For example, a man falls in love and does something stupid. But if it's true love, he won't blame himself too much, because it will be obvious to him that "I could not have done otherwise." In my opinion, one's gut feeling is more important than one's reason.

4. To develop, to become better. To try to atone for mistakes I made in the past and not to repeat them. To live in peace and harmony with myself; to live mindfully. To try to make someone happier and the world around me better.

5. When I'm able to live in accordance with my gut feeling; when I'm able to overcome temptations and my own weaknesses.

6. When I'm not able to do the above.

7. Indifference and apathy.

8. Love saves the world.

9. Literature.

10. "Freedom is a known necessity." (Spinoza)

11. I can't single out just one book. Favorite books: *Steppenwolf* by Herman Hesse, *Shantaram* by Gregory

David Roberts; *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: 101 Zen Stories*; *The Dark Tower* by Stephen King; *The Magus* by John Fowles.

12. “Thou shalt not make unto thee an idol,” but I consider Alexei Anatolievich Navalny to be an absolute example of real principle, courage and resilience.

13. I’m sitting in prison, and my letters are checked by censors. I don’t want to write anything unnecessary. So I’ll say this: today and always Russia is my own country, which I love very much. I also believe that, despite all the difficulties, Russia will definitely be wonderful and happy!

Dmitry Alexandrovich GROMOVOY

(b. 1983)



Lived in the city of Snezhinsk, in the Chelyabinsk Region. Lawyer; human rights activist; journalist. Unmarried; has a young child. Before his detention, Gromovoy wrote for the newspaper Public Defender. That paper published his investigative reports on drug trafficking in Chelyabinsk. On July 28, 2020, Dmitry Gromovoy was detained and remanded into custody three days later under Articles 30 and 228.1 of the Russian Criminal

Code (“attempted illegal sale of a large amount of narcotic drugs on the Internet by a group of persons acting in collusion”, punishable by up to 7.5 years in prison). The defense maintains that the case was fabricated. Gromovoy himself says that the charges against him are invented, the facts falsified, while the whole story is revenge by law enforcement for his attempt to prove that employees of the local drug control unit (under the Ministry of Internal Affairs) were involved in drug trafficking via the Internet. His case has yet to come to trial.

After speaking in his own defense during criminal proceedings (Gromovoy’s lawyer maintains that drugs were planted on his client), Dmitry gradually turned to defending the rights of other victims of law enforcement overreach: he began acting as a public defender.

Grigory, hello! My name is Dmitry Gromovoy. I received your letter from our volunteer friends. Thank you very much for your words of support! I will be happy to try to answer your questions for AUTO-GRAPH.

1. I'm a fighter against injustice, a human rights activist, and a bit of an investigative journalist.

2. I believe in the power of human thought and reason.

3. When making the most important decisions, I rely on my reason. But once I've made my decision, I sometimes listen to my gut feeling, how it reacts to that decision, and then, in very rare cases, I make small adjustments to my plan of action.

4. The most important thing in life to me is life itself and what I manage to leave behind.

5. The thing that brings me the most joy is achieving the goals I set for myself.

6. What most saddens me, I find hard to define. But right now, in the moment, it saddens me that the world has gone mad and brother nations are killing each other.

7. In my opinion, the greatest evil to mankind is human stupidity; all the principal evils are its consequences.

8. The greatest benefit to mankind is Mother Nature.

9. I find it hard to say which art form has the strongest effect on me; I suppose cinema.

10. Favorite quotes: “The impossible is possible”; “That which does not kill us makes us stronger”; “I came, I saw, I conquered”; “The stronger man is not the one who didn’t fall, but the one who, having fallen, was able to get up”; “Man is mortal, and sometimes suddenly so.”

11. I find it hard to choose one, most important book, so I’ll say the *Constitution of the Russian Federation*.

12. There are probably many people from whom one might borrow a character trait, a particular quality, a behavioral style, etc., but the person who could be considered a role model doesn’t exist. In this matter, I’m of the opinion that “thou shalt not make unto thee an idol.”

13. What is Russia to me today? To me, Russia today is a long-suffering Mother, who has been taken hostage by a gang of tyrants. They are ruthlessly exploiting her, using her richest resources to achieve their personal ends, keeping her in fear and blackmailing her with the destruction of her children—the people of Russia.

Grigory, I have briefly answered your questions as I understand them. Perhaps, for a more complete picture, I should answer some follow-up questions. If you have any, please send them to me and I will be happy to answer them.

Thank you again for your words of support and solidarity. It is a pleasure to meet you in such an unusual way.

With best regards,
Dmitry

Andrei Borisovich EDIGAREV (b. 1962)



Lived in Glazov, in the eastern Udmurt Republic. Former deputy of the Glazov City Duma. In November 2022, Edigarev took part in the Congress of People’s Deputies of Russia in Poland. (A meeting of former deputies of different levels, a would-be parliament for the transfer of power after the collapse of Putin’s regime, it was initiated by former State Duma deputy Ilya Ponomarev.) In April 2023, the Con-

gress was declared an “undesirable” organization by the Russian Prosecutor General’s Office. On May 18, 2023, the homes of opposition politicians in Moscow and St. Petersburg were searched in connection with a case being brought against Ponomarev on charges of “spreading false information about the Russian Army.”

On May 15, 2023, Rosfinmonitoring included Edigarev in a list of persons involved in extremism and terrorism. He was detained shortly thereafter under Article 205.2 of the Russian Criminal Code (“justifying terrorism via the Internet”) and transferred to a pre-trial detention center in Izhevsk.

If convicted, Edigarev faces up to seven years in prison.

Hello Grigory Shalvovich, I am political prisoner
Andrei Edigarev. I am 61 years old. I am from the city of

Glazov in the Udmurt Republic. I would be happy to answer the questions in your AUTO-GRAPH questionnaire.

1. This may be the most difficult question: “Who am I?” I define myself as a free man, a citizen of the world and a patriot of Russia. Of Russia, not of the regime and what is associated with it.

2. I believe in justice, in goodness, and in a person’s sincere relationship with their friends, family, nature, and the world around them.

3. When making decisions, in my opinion, you can’t do without both your reason and your gut feeling. Here I cannot give a preference, it all depends on the specific situation.

4. To me, the most important thing is the happiness of my loved ones, their health and well-being. All this is impossible without peace and harmony, respect for human rights, respect for nature and the planet Earth.

5. The laughter of my children and grandchildren; the happy eyes of my loved ones; the joy of fellowship.

6. The lack of historical memory among my fellow citizens and, as a consequence, the horror of the situation in which my wretched country now finds itself.

7. Wars, of course, and the criminal selfishness and irresponsibility of both the people who started the war and those who wittingly and unwittingly contribute to it.

8. Citizen diplomacy; open and civilized relations; and, of course, respect for human rights.

9. Books and music.

10. “You shame me in public, saying that I am a drunkard, if not a thief. I am ready to agree with your words, but are you worthy to pass judgment?” (Omar Khayyam)

11. I think that book is still ahead of me.

12. Yuri Yulianovich Shevchuk [DDT rock band]

13. Russia to me today is an enormous sadness and a nagging wound. It’s a society that doesn’t exist; people have withdrawn into themselves; they don’t want to know anything or be responsible for anything. Their callousness and bitterness is astonishing. Yet I’m sure that they can be happy, open, kind, and hospitable. True, for that they will have to go through a painful process of purification.

Felix Viktorovich ELISEYEV (b. 1988)



Lived in Lipetsk. Taught history at a rural school, then worked as a security guard at a collective farm. Creator of three left-radical Telegram channels under the alias Rumata Estorsky. Detained in December 2022 on charges of “justifying terrorism” (Art. 205.2 of the Russian Criminal Code) in an anti-war post. In April 2023, a second case was brought under the same article because of a second

post (April 1, 2022): “Good for the Ukrainians, they hit an oil depot in Belgorod... It’s good to hit an aggressor on their territory, makes me think of the bombing of Berlin by Soviet aviation in August 1941.”

In September 2023, Eliseyev was additionally charged with “treason” (Article 275). He had allegedly transferred money from his account to the crypto-account of someone connected with the Ukrainian Armed Forces. A videotaped “confession” by “UAF sponsor” Eliseyev, wearing long sleeves, with his face blurred and voice changed (so that one couldn’t tell what had been done to him to get him to confess), was shown on TV.

On December 19, 2023, Felix Eliseyev was sentenced to 14 years in a strict-regime penal colony.

1. I’m a human being.
2. I don’t believe in anything.
3. On nothing.
4. Social revolution.

5. The death of members of the ruling class.
6. That Russia exists on the globe.
7. Russia.
8. Social revolution.
9. Soviet poster art of the 1920s.
10. “The state is an apparatus of violence for the oppression of one class by another.”
11. *The State and Revolution* (Lenin)
12. Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin).
13. Nothing. [Russia] shouldn't exist.

Mikhail Alexandrovich ZHARIKOV (b. 1984)



Lived in Nizhny Novgorod. Commentator and announcer for the Nizhny Novgorod ice hockey club Torpedo. Divorced father of a daughter. On June 2, 2023, Zharikov posted a monologue on Instagram in which he said that Russia was “repeating the path of Nazi Germany”; as well, he criticized Russians for the lack of mass anti-war protests. The next day he was detained by police because of

an earlier post announcing a rally for imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny. Zharikov was forced to make a videotaped apology and jailed for eight days for the administrative offense of “organizing an unauthorized event.”

On July 6, 2023, Zharikov was charged with “spreading false information about the Russian Armed Forces” (Article 207.3 of the Russian Criminal Code) because of his June monologue on Instagram—and sent to pre-trial detention.

On August 1, 2023, Zharikov was additionally charged with “rehabilitating Nazism” (Article 354.1) because of a social media post in which he wrote that Prague was liberated in 1945 not by the Red Army, but by the Czech resistance and soldiers under Vlasov (the Soviet general turned German collaborator).

Finally, Zharikov was charged with “publicly justifying terrorism” (Article 205.2) because of a comment he posted about the car bombing of pro-Kremlin propagandist Zakhar Prilepin.

On October 20, 2023, Mikhail Zharikov was sentenced to six years in a general-regime penal colony.

1. Who am I? It's hard to answer this question in a unipolar way, and still harder to answer it objectively. But I would like to believe that I am a human being, in the fullest and most natural sense of the word!

2. I believe in man, that he and only he can determine his fate and future. I believe in the power of reason, but also in goodness. I would say that my faith is a faith on the border between pragmatism and idealism.

3. I rely on my inner voice. This is a largely abstract, ephemeral concept, of course, but it is this voice or whisper that ultimately has the greatest influence on my decisions. Sometimes this voice is quick and expressed as an impulse; other times it speaks fluently and at length.

4. The most important thing in life to me globally is to live life in harmony with myself, not to betray myself, to be a Human Being. To learn more, to gain knowledge and omniscience—that is my personal goal. From a more “down-to-earth perspective”, I also care about the health and well-being of my family. And as a working goal, I want to become the best ice hockey analyst, commentator and historian. Talking about this game is not a job, it's my life's work!

5. What brings me joy? It seems to me that as you get older you come to realize what's most important. I'm convinced that happiness and joy are in the simplest things: in a new day, in the smiles of loved ones, in all the mostly non-material things that give you inner harmony and spiritual catharsis.

6. What saddens me most is when lies triumph, when the majority, believing in their "plausibility", dehumanize and disgrace themselves. It's also very depressing that people are unwilling to think, to grow, to develop. People like that are not people, they're consumers.

7. I am sure that all evil comes from an unwillingness and inability to talk and negotiate. Some people live in the past, trying to revive and implant it, often by force.

Evil also comes from the refusal to understand that all people are different, that you must listen to everyone and respect everyone, even if their opinion does not agree with yours. Otherwise the era of medieval wars and feuds will never end. A certain person refuses to understand this; his vices are greater than any sense of duty.

8. Progress, innovation, new hypotheses, technology, new discoveries: all these things are of benefit to humanity; they are not related to aggression and violence.

They are of benefit only, plus protection of and respect for nature!

9. To me, a book is the strongest and most powerful source of everything: ideas, art, perception. A book is a portal where nothing and no one can control the reader! Books are the holy grail of art!

10. I really like Kipling's poems; there are lines like these: "If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,/ Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,/ If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,/ If all men count with you, but none too much;/ If you can fill the unforgiving minute/ With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,/ Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,/ And—which is more— you'll be a Man, my son!"

11. *Those Burdened by Evil* by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. This book had the maximum impact on me. There's something magical about it, alchemical even.

12. My role model is a Canadian ice hockey player of the mid-20th century, Maurice Richard. A man who had a major impact on the abolition of Francophobia in the NHL and was a fighter both on and off the ice, sometimes fighting alone against the whole world and circumstances.

13. To me, Russia today is like Doctor Budach, that character in the Strugatskys' *Hard to Be a God*. Budach wanders and searches, seeking enlightenment in a dark, stuffy space, reaching for the light. For now, he is alone in his quest. A persistent allegory is the navigator who has drifted off course and lost his bearings in the monotonous flow. Still I hope that, even though he has lost his bearings, he will defy historical stereotypes and reach the shores of a new Earth, the land of the future, where everyone finds what they are looking for, where Goodness and Love dwell in and guide everyone, and we will have peace and tranquility.

Anton Alexandrovich ZHUCHKOV (b. 1983)



Moved to Moscow from Omsk after his mother died in 2019. Zhuchkov tried various professions, most recently working as a security guard at a medical center. On March 6, 2022, Anton Zhuchkov had just come out of the Metro and was on his way to an unauthorized anti-war protest on Pushkin Square with his friend Vladimir Sergeyev (p. 303) when they were detained. Zhuchkov disappeared. Relatives finally found him nearly

a week later at the Sklifosovsky Institute, in intensive care.

Zhuchkov and Sergeyev had planned to commit suicide as a “protest against the military operation in Ukraine and Russia’s confrontation with the West.” Their detention did not stop them: they both took lethal doses of methadone in front of the police. At Sklifosovsky their stomachs were pumped. On their discharge from hospital, they were arrested and sent to pre-trial detention.

Anton Zhuchkov was later convicted under Article 205 of the Russian Criminal Code (“preparation of a terrorist act by a group of persons working in collusion”): the investigation said the two men planned to set fire to police vans. As well, he was convicted under Article 228 (“illegal acquisition of drugs”).

On April 20, 2023, Zhuchkov was sentenced to 10 years: three years in prison and then seven years in a strict-regime penal colony.

1. A perpetual student; a dreamer from the virtual world of gaming.
2. In the world soul; in the growth of mankind's humanity and intelligence.
3. On inner feelings of justice and kindness.
4. Freedom and independence for myself and others.
5. When you do people a good turn, and it's for the best.
6. Human stupidity, cowardice and malice.
7. Turning into a cog in the machine; becoming depersonalized.
8. Performing a selfless good deed; individuality.
9. Visual arts. Computer games. Older music.
10. "The best revenge is not to be like your enemy."
Marcus Aurelius Antoninus.
11. *The Lord of the Rings*.
12. Keanu Reeves.
13. To me, it's a prison.

Zakhar Vladimirovich ZARIPOV (b. 1984)



Lived in Sovetskaya Gavan (pop. 23,000), in the Khabarovsk Krai. Taught math in two penal colonies (special- and strict-regime); writer. Married; father of two small daughters. On March 2, 2022, Zaripov published a letter on his LiveJournal blog under the nickname scribble_33. The letter was addressed to Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov: it urged him not to send Chechen fighters to Putin's war in Ukraine, but rather to

use them to seek independence for the Chechen Republic. Zaripov's letter ran as follows:

“Dear Ramzan Akhmatovich! Now the best Russian troops are concentrated on the territory of another state. Moscow and putin [sic] are completely defenseless. Hold back your troops. Do not send your best men to die in Kyiv, send them to take Moscow! Under present conditions, a limited contingent of a few thousand bayonets could easily take control of government buildings in Russia. You will declare that you have seized power, overthrow a dictator already condemned by the whole world, and stop the war. This will allow Chechnya to gain independence and avenge all the deaths and humiliation inflicted by the Russian authorities over the past 26 years. This is a perfect historical chance; there may not be another in

your lifetime. Lenin took Russia with 1,500 men personally devoted to him. You have 40,000 top fighting men at your disposal. That is quite enough.”

On January 23, 2023, Zaripov was charged with “incitement to terrorist acts using the Internet” (Article 205.2 of the Russian Criminal Code). The Center for Combating Extremism claimed the letter to Kadyrov contained “the incitement of an indefinite number of persons to terrorist activity by means of armed seizure of power so as to violate the integrity of the Russian Federation.”

On the Telegram channel “OPER leaked”, which posts inside information from law enforcers, the reasons for Zaripov’s arrest included the following one: “While teaching convicts, themselves deprived of the opportunity of receiving objective and timely information, the bright-eyed Zaripov deliberately discredited the Russian Armed Forces and misinterpreted the goals of the Special Military Operation.”

If convicted, Zakhar Zaripov faces up to seven years in prison.

I’m certainly glad you “admire my fearlessness,” but it’s not really about fearlessness per se (although I’m certainly not afraid of anyone or anything... for my own sake; the only thing I’m afraid for is my family: my wife and two small daughters; however, as long as they are unharmed, I cannot be frightened). Rather it’s about the fact that I spent my childhood and youth (and indeed most of my conscious life) in a free country where I could say and write whatever I wanted. I simply physically cannot change my way of thinking and living simply because... by

the way, why? I still cannot get a straight answer to this question from people who call themselves patriots. That's my point: don't romanticize me (and others like me). I'm not "standing up for my beliefs at the cost of my own freedom." I'm just living the way I always have, because I don't know how and don't want to know how to live any other way (keeping my mouth shut).

1. I will gladly answer your questions and, by the way, I would be very "in favor" if, thanks to you, people were to get to know "me personally" better. :) Perhaps I should introduce myself: I am Zakhar Vladimirovich Zaripov, a Far-Eastern fiction writer—briefly: "The Tale of the White Bear" (a fairy tale): "The Right to the Rainbow" (journalism), "Quantum Void" (fiction)—I chose the shortest things, I would be honored if you read them. I'm a mathematician by education (Physics Department of Amur Humanitarian and Pedagogical State University). I wrote my dissertation on cognitive psychology (mathematical modeling of thinking processes), but did not defend it—I couldn't pass the PhD minimum in English (mathematicians are not good at languages, and vice versa). I'm married, the only breadwinner in the family, our views are ultra-traditional, as is the division of

family roles. I'm a Far-Eastern nationalist, i.e. I consider Siberians to be a separate nation, and Far Easterners to be a separate part (ethnos) of this nation, because geographically (geologically) the Far East is Siberia. The differences between the mentality of Siberians (including Far Easterners) and the mentality of Muscovites (inhabitants of the European part of Russia) are quite obvious (I could, of course, substantiate this in detail, but it would require another letter). To the east of the Urals lives 25% of the population, but they bring in 75% of the foreign currency earnings, while receiving less than 25% of imports (the Russian Federation itself produces nothing)—this is unfair and unacceptable. At the same time, I have to emphasize that talking about this has nothing to do with separatism. Crimea is a republic—and to acknowledge this fact is not to compromise the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. There are many republics in the Russian Federation. If before they were only national republics, then now there are also Russian-speaking republics. This does not violate the Constitution and laws of the Russian Federation in any way.

2. I don't believe in anything. Science does not imply belief: there are facts, interpretations of facts (hypotheses), and generalizations with predictive power, confirmed experimentally (theories). Scientists can, of course, trust

certain sources and authorities (so as not to have to double-check the entire body of scientific data), but only as long as these are consistent with their observations, since “faith” and “trust” are very different things.

3. There is no such thing as reason, as [Viktor] Dolnik has convincingly proved: neural networks do not indicate internal algorithms. Therefore, decisions are always made according to “gut feeling” for which people find “rational bases” afterwards (Kazantseva, Drobyshevsky, Panchin et al.). Of course, I do try to make decisions guided by rational motives, but, like most people, I don’t always manage this (and it’s often self-deception). Alas. Then again, 4.5 billion years of evolution cannot be taken away, and maybe that’s not such a bad thing (after all, 4.5 billion years of evolution have helped survival a lot).

4. Family, reproduction, immortality. A human being consists of a “body”, a physical object assembled according to our genes; and consciousness (“spirit”), a set of statistically reliable reactions to stimuli, conditioned by our upbringing and environment. The “genes” we pass on to our children at birth (they carry our genes), the “spirit”

we put into them during the nurturing process. Since they are a continuation of our “body” (same genes) and our “spirit” (same goals, values, reactions), then in essence our children are us. This is the physical immortality available to people.

5. Alcohol (it’s awful, but nothing else on earth can give you that feeling of happiness) and intelligent discussions.

6. Stupidity. Even with a villain, if he’s clever, you can come to an agreement, but not with a fool (it’s better to lose with a clever man than to find with a fool).

7. The inability (but more often unwillingness) to negotiate. We have inherited bad behavior from our ancestors—as a rule, there are two models: submitting to the strong, commanding the weak; obedience goes unrewarded, while disobedience is punished. In this model, cooperation outside the reference group is impossible. For most of humanity, this is the norm.

8. The ability to negotiate: all of civilization’s achievements—from the division of labor to democracy—are its manifestations.

9. The art form that most affects me is cinema. I’d like to say books, but that would be a lie: cinema

mesmerizes more of the senses and a priori has a stronger effect. *The Hunger Games*, for example, is frankly a bad book, but the movie is magnificent. No question about it if the book doesn't even contain the principal phrase of the "president" (in fact a dictator for life) Coriolanus Snow, which can be taken as a prologue to the events of the 21st century (and indeed, much of human history): "Whoever ignores the lessons of history will pay the most terrible price."

10. —

11. *Foundation* by Isaac Asimov. He is so accurate in describing historical events he never saw that it instils a lifelong respect for the scientific method and rational thinking (but it would take another letter to elaborate).

12. [Russian-born financier] Andrei Movchan is the perfect balance between family and work, cynicism and rationality, the most sober assessment of reality without distortions caused by wishful thinking (that is why his economic and political forecasts are extremely accurate and, unfortunately, always come true).

13. A prison of peoples.

Konstantin Sergeyevich ZELTSEV (b. 2003)



Lived in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk. Konstantin Zeltsev and four other boys then between the ages of 17 and 20—Matvei Kirillov, Yegor Kusunets (p. 228), Vladislav Turtugeshev, and Kirill Shekhter—were detained in January 2023 on charges of “willful destruction of property” (Article 167 of the Russian Criminal Code, punishable by up to five years in prison). Between December 26, 2022, and January 4, 2023, the five

had allegedly set fire to relay cabinets near the Bugach railway station so as to disrupt train schedules; they had also reportedly thrown a burning petrol bottle through the open window of an electric locomotive. The original charge was later reclassified as “railway sabotage” (Article 281, punishable by up to 20 years in prison).

Hello, Boris! Thank you very much for your letter! A pleasure to get. :-) And thank you very much for your support! Your very strong and intelligent words! Thank you!

1. A human being first and foremost, of course! Kind, compassionate, fair, caring, helpful in any situation!
2. I believe in my bright future, despite life’s inconveniences and problems.

3. I rely on my reason, but sometimes on my gut feeling.
:-)

4. The most important thing in life is my family and being happy. :-)

5. A smile and my family and friends' good mood.

6. People who pretend to be who they're not; lies.

7. Injustice, lies.

8. Industriousness, efficiency, sometimes luck, and determination.

9. Mostly music; philosophy.

10. Measure twice, and cut once.

11. Psychology. Robin Sharma.

12. Yes. Basketball player Michael Jordan and my father.

13. A great, mighty power! A developing country!

Let's be in touch!

Antonina Konstantinovna ZIMINA (b. 1986)



Lived in Kaliningrad. Moved to Moscow a few months before her arrest. Holds a degree in international relations from Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University. Until 2016, Antonina Zimina was director of the Baltic Center for Cultural Dialogue, which she co-founded with her lawyer husband, Kostantin Antonets. She also worked with the Gorchakov Foundation for the Support of Public Diplomacy; it was set up in

2010 by then President Dmitry Medvedev for purposes of improving Russia's image abroad. Zimina became a member of the Gorchakov Foundation's Friends Club; she was listed as an independent expert on the club's website.

Zimina and Antonets married in 2015. One guest came uninvited: Maxim Denisenko. Denisenko introduced himself to the Latvians present as an FSB operative with influence in the region; he also appeared in wedding photos and videos that wound up on social media and even Baltic TV. In July 2018, Zimina was charged with "treason" (Article 275 of the Russian Criminal Code): she had allegedly passed "secret information" to foreign intelligence. A year later, her husband was arrested on the same charge.

On December 24, 2020, Zimina was sentenced by the Kaliningrad Regional Court to 13 years in a general-regime penal colony, while Antonets was sentenced to 12.5 years.

Hello, Grigory, thank you very much for your support, for such warm words. It's nice to know (at times it touches me to the point of tears) that people remember me on the outside. It took me a long time to collect my thoughts and consider the questions in your questionnaire. I pondered over every one, but sometimes the answer was the simplest, although one could go deeper into discussions (into interior monologues in my case).

1. A person who is trying to survive in a prison camp and—if I'm very, very lucky—to remain a human being.

2. I believe in people's ability to sacrifice themselves for ideals and higher goals. I believe in friendship (not here, of course, but there, on the outside).

3. When making the most important decisions, I always wonder if I won't be devoured by my inner tape worm, my conscience (I've always indulged that parasite). The worst is when you must choose between doing something stupid or something despicable. And then, completely aware, angry at yourself, you consciously do the stupid thing.

4. Human decency.

5. I'm happy when I have the chance to contemplate nature, when, during the senseless wait while standing in formation, I can look at the flowers and bees. In prison, I've

turned my mind to small pleasures. Recently, I was happy to eat ice cream for the first time in five years; happy to get letters; happy at the chance to sit quietly by myself at night, answering those letters while everyone else was asleep.

6. I'm saddened by people's lack of desire to change anything. I'm saddened by the fragility of people (as beings), their fragility in the face of illness and external factors. Here, given the harsh conditions and the lack of medicines, this is especially striking.

7. The greatest evil is brought by indifference, a lack of compassion (although here's the paradox: in camp, these two qualities, while eating away at your soul, help you to save yourself physically).

8. The greatest good is brought by the ability to think (especially to think globally, detached from one's day-to-day circumstances) and to analyze a situation.

9. My favorite art form is painting. I'm very inspired by the works of René Magritte.

10. Yes: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." I believe that all evil done will inevitably come

back to one. This helps me to remain human.

11. I consider that every stage of human life has its own books. At a very young age, I loved adventure novels. After university, I loved political science and political analysis. When I was imprisoned, I began to love Solzhenitsyn and other writers who had been in the GULAG. But the main book in my life is still the Bible, which I have turned to at different periods and always found comfort and food for thought.

12. It's hard to single out any one person. I am very attracted to the images of monks, ascetics, people who recognize something higher through the renunciation of certain earthly goods, probably because it is easier to perceive life in confinement as asceticism.

13. Russia today has become a strange seething cauldron in which good intentions are bubbling together with ideas that once had a chance to be realized—and all of this in a rapid slide back to dictatorship. Judging by the news from the outside, I'm sometimes horrified. I catch myself thinking that here, in camp, we have more freedom in certain respects. No matter what you say, you won't be imprisoned. Here you can be supercilious and refuse to

sew a military uniform. For that you get 15 days in solitary confinement. Not so terrible, though many are afraid. The appalling distortions of the bureaucratic law-enforcement system, or, to be more exact, of the regime-preservation system are slower to reach the camp. Even here, in camp, one can already feel the fatigue of this system and one has the constant sense that Russia is on the threshold of something new and very important, both frightening and hopeful.

I hope this letter will be allowed through since it does not contain a detailed description of camp life. Even the censorship here is very peculiar. For example, if you write “bad porridge,” they won’t let your letter through (for the censors the porridge must be “good”). On the other hand, if you write that things are “bad in our country,” the censors will let that through. We’re convicts and cannot know for sure what’s going on in Russia, whereas the quality of the porridge has to do with the conditions of our confinement. I see the system’s fatigue in this as well. Even here I can see how views and opinions are changing.

With much gratitude and hope that these answers will be helpful to someone.

A.K. Zimina

Andrei Yurievich IVASHEV (b. 1960)



Lived in Syktyvkar, capital of the northern Komi Republic. Civil rights activist; public defender who represented fellow activists in court. Regularly took part in protests; had a blog. Veteran of many one-person pickets in support of freedom of assembly. Pensioner. On November 29, 2021, criminal proceedings were instituted against Andrei Ivashev on charges of “incitement to hatred” (Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code) and “contempt of court” (Article 297). The charges stemmed from nine posts published online between June 21 and July 26, 2021, allegedly by Ivashev, criticizing local officials, federal lawmakers and Vladimir Putin, as well as a judge on the Syktyvkar City Court. In its description of the case, the Memorial Human Rights Center included excerpts from the “criminal” posts, including this one: “According to what ‘laws’ has the justice system in modern Russia been rebuilt? The nation’s Führer V.V. Putin made that clear to Russian society long ago—according to fascist laws... It looks like a ‘Unification of the Great Russian and Ukrainian peoples’ is in the works.”

In February 2022, Ivashev was additionally charged with “incitement to extremist acts” (Article 280) because of three comments he allegedly made online in 2020, calling for the assassination of Vladimir Uyba, governor of the Komi Republic, and Oleg Mikhailov, then a deputy in the local Duma.

In March 2023, the three comments underpinning the “extremist” charge were reclassified as “promotion of terrorist activity” (Article 205.2).

On May 24, 2023, Andrei Ivashev was sentenced to six years in a general-regime penal colony.

1. A human being; a citizen of Russia.
2. In the Holy Spirit.
3. On my gut feeling; and to a lesser extent on reason.
4. My daughter’s happiness.
5. [The idea that] the source of power is the people.
6. Creating idols.
7. The assumption that one is surrounded by enemies.
8. Mercantilism and indifference.
9. Music.
10. Do what the Holy Spirit tells you to do.
11. I study every day, so I don’t have one favorite book.
12. Lev Tolstoy (Count).
13. A crab. An aquatic arthropod that lives in fresh water, moving rapidly backwards into the “future”. Its body has a chitinous shell.

Boris Yulyevich KAGARLITSKY (b. 1958)



Lived in Moscow. Sociologist; professor; writer; leftist politician; creator of the YouTube channel Rabkor. In 1982, Kagarlitsky was arrested for anti-Soviet propaganda and spent a year inside Lefortovo. In 1989, The Thinking Reed: Intellectuals and the Soviet State from 1917 to the Present was the first of his many books to be translated into English.

In the early days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Kagarlitsky aired his anti-war views on Rabkor. He also commented on the Crimean Bridge blast in October 2022, calling the bridge "not only strategic, but symbolic, the main achievement of the Putin era and material proof that in Russia, despite the rampant stealing and inefficiency, you can still achieve practical results if you invest 400-500 percent of the technologically necessary funds." A tongue-in cheek video essay followed. On July 25, 2023, Kagarlitsky was detained on charges of "justifying terrorism" (Article 205.2 of the Russian Criminal Code). On December 12, 2023, he was released with orders to pay a fine of 600,000 rubles (\$6,500).

On February 13, 2024, after the prosecutor appealed, Boris Kagarlitsky was sentenced to five years in a general-regime penal colony.

Special thanks to Boris Akunin (Grigory Shalvovich) for his letter. I'm glad to meet him in absentia, even under these circumstances. I will try to answer his questions, but

I must confess right off that it will be very difficult to do so. The wording of the questions presumes either short unambiguous answers or lengthy philosophical discussions over dozens of pages. Short answers seem to me inadequate, and I'm not now ready to write a philosophical treatise—besides, it's not my genre. However, I will respond to the questionnaire as best I can. (Please, if my responses are published, be sure to include this preamble).

1. A human being. If you're interested in my political views, I'm a socialist, a democrat, and a Marxist. If you're interested in my academic pursuits, I'm a sociologist, a political scientist, and an historian.

2. People can believe in different things, often even contradictory ideas and principles. I don't rely much on faith, I prefer knowledge. You could say that I believe in science, reason, and progress. But again, the reference to faith in this case is paradoxical. You have to know and understand.

3. My important decisions are guided by ideological and ethical principles. Although some important decisions have nothing to do with science or politics. Anything to do with my personal life, family, friends, cats. In any case,

reason is indispensable. But how can we do without intuition? Without our own “small” code of ethics regulating everyday matters? And finally, how can we do without tactics? What is our goal, what will come out of what we’ve done? Our responsibility to others and even to ourselves is very important.

4. There are so many important things in my life: my political activities; and my books; and people close to me; as well as animals. Everything and everyone is important.

5. Life itself. It’s full of interesting experiences; feelings; knowledge; impressions.

6. My mistakes sadden me most. I try to recognize them and correct them, though it’s unpleasant to recognize them. I also feel badly about time spent without meaning or pleasure. But that happens rarely.

7. Evil is a moral and philosophical concept. The bearers of evil are sure that they are acting, ultimately, for the good (remember Goethe’s Mephistopheles). This is often true even in the context of an historical process. The rub is that, morally, evil is still evil.

8. Benefit for whom? For the oppressors or the oppressed? For the exploiters or the exploited? Society is divided by interests. What matters is which side you're on. My principle is to be on the side of the exploited and often disenfranchised majority.

9. I love movies and painting. I also love architecture. I don't know anything about music. Unfortunately, I rarely go to the theater. And yes, of course, literature is everything.

10. I don't have a favorite quote. There are dozens of favorite sayings from the classics of social thought. If you like, I'll cite two. In his XI Thesis on Feuerbach, Marx wrote that "the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." And in his essay "Politics as a Vocation," Max Weber talks about taking responsibility for the consequences of one's actions. Not only for the actions themselves, but for their consequences. This is very important.

11. Dozens, maybe hundreds of books. But if I have to name only a few, then I'll name: Marx's *Capital*, Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and Hobbes's *Leviathan*.

12. A lot of people. They're all different. And they teach us different things. Each to his own. It could be Churchill, it could be Che Guevara. I don't have an iconic hero. There are dozens of people from the past whom I admire, and from whom I try to learn.

13. Russia to me today is what it was yesterday. The country where I have lived all my life and for whose future I work.

Dmitry Vladimirovich KAMYNIN (b. 1984)



Lived in Kemerovo. Coordinator of the human rights project Sibir Pravovaya (Law-based Siberia), a YouTube channel that showed video interviews with former convicts who spoke about the beatings, extortion and abuse in Kuzbass pre-trial detention centers and penal colonies. On December 10, 2020, Kamynin was attacked by a group of men on Vera Voloshina Street in Kemerovo. They threw

him to the ground and started beating him. The video provided by Kamynin’s mother showed him, prone on the ground, being kicked in the head. The beatings continued at the police station, where Kamynin lost consciousness. He was charged with “drug possession” (Article 228 of the Russian Criminal Code) and later with “extortion” (Article 163).

In December 2022, Kamynin reported violence on the part of detention-center staff. He complained about the unbearable conditions of confinement and went on a hunger strike for two months in protest. Much of his time was spent in punishment cells for spurious reasons, according to his family.

On June 7, 2023, Dmitry Kamynin was sentenced to 18 years in a strict-regime penal colony.

Hello, Boris. I’ll be honest with you: I never got involved in politics, I lived a completely different life. I just made videos about torture and beatings in places of detention, nothing more. That’s why I ended up here. They

found a pretext for putting me in prison (drugs); they orchestrated a provocation and slipped some drugs in my pocket.

My responses to your questions.

1. A man caught in a trap.
2. I believe.
3. Reason.
4. Family.
5. Communication.
6. Betrayal.
7. Dependence.
8. Freedom.
9. Cinema.
10. No answer.
11. The Bible, I guess.
12. Yes.
13. Murk, total darkness.

Vladimir Vladimirovich KARA-MURZA

(b. 1981)



Cambridge-educated Russian politician, author, historian, filmmaker, and columnist for The Washington Post. Based in the United States. Married; father of three. A longtime colleague of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, Vladimir Kara-Murza stood for Russian Parliament and served as deputy leader of the People's Freedom Party. He played a key role in the adoption

of Magnitsky Act sanctions on Russian human rights violators in the US, the EU, Canada and the UK. In May 2015, three months after Nemtsov's assassination, Kara-Murza was poisoned while in Moscow and nearly died. In February 2017, he was again poisoned and again given a 5% chance of survival. In February 2021, a Bellingcat joint investigation with The Insider and Der Spiegel found that Kara-Murza had been followed both times by the same FSB unit that later poisoned Alexei Navalny.

In March 2022, Vladimir Kara-Murza addressed the House of Representatives in Arizona, home state of his late champion Sen. John McCain. He talked about Putin's "war of aggression" abroad, his decimation of the opposition movement at home, and the continued resistance, despite all the risks, in civil society. "We do know," said Kara-Murza, "that the night is darkest before the dawn... and that Russia will become, in the words of Alexei Navalny, 'a normal European country'."

On his return to Moscow in April 2022, Kara-Murza was arrested. A year later he was sentenced under Article 275 of the Russian Criminal Code (“treason”) to 25 years in a strict-regime penal colony.

1. Politician, historian, journalist. In that order.

2. In God. In the fact that democracy in every instance is better than dictatorship. And, despite everything, in a free and civilized future for Russia.

3. Preferably on both. But if I have to choose, then on my gut feeling. It isn’t usually wrong.

4. Freedom.

5. Family.

6. Untapped opportunities.

7. An insatiable thirst for power.

8. The ability to learn from one’s mistakes.

9. Music.

10. “In the end, the moral choice turns out to be the most pragmatic.” (Andrei Sakharov)

11. *To Build a Castle: My Life as a Dissenter* by Vladimir Bukovsky.

12. Boris Nemtsov.

13. A beautiful, talented, beloved country now under the rule of scoundrels. But we will, I believe, correct that.

Shokhista Sodikovna KARIMOVA

(b. 1971)



Grew up in Uzbekistan. Lived in Lesnoi Gorodok, near Moscow. Worked in the kitchen of a café. On April 3, 2017, a Russian citizen of Uzbek origin blew himself up on the St. Petersburg Metro. Three days later Karimova was detained. The investigation said the man had had 11 accomplices, including her. The Memorial Human Rights Center, after a thorough study of the case, found that at least nine of those convicted were innocent. Shokhista Karimova was sentenced to 19 years and 11 months in a general-regime penal colony.

My thanks to Grigory Chkhartishvili for worrying about me and supporting me. Over the years I've seen and met kind and beautiful young ladies from the Public Oversight Commission (ONK). They helped me and others. In St. Petersburg, I corresponded with so many young ladies, and they did a lot of noble things for me.

Dear Grigory, I will respond to your lines about the word "fearlessness". I have been given a terrible sentence. I've been separated from my family. My minutes, my years

have been taken away from me. The life of my children has been ruined. My health has worsened. My elderly mother, shedding tears, is still alive... What am I afraid of? My conscience is clear. I have not sinned before the people.

With best regards,

Shokhista

Publish this letter.

Yan Nikolayevich KATELEVSKY (b. 1981)



Lived in the town of Ramenskoye, near Moscow. Carpenter turned blogger and journalist. For at least five years before their arrest, Yan Katelevsky and fellow journalist Alexander Dorogov had investigated police corruption. They published their work on Rosderzhava, a website recognized as an official media outlet; on the YouTube channels Dvizheniye

and All Rus News; and on their personal channels. Katelevsky's channel (registered in 2011) had amassed over 500 videos, 300,000 subscribers and 100,000,000 views.

Katelevsky first became widely known in 2016 when he was detained for filming at the Ramenskoye police department; he was jailed for 12 days. His confiscated phone, still in recording mode for several hours, caught the judge's conversations with police officers and proved they were acting in collusion and had fabricated the charges. The scandal was hushed up, but the Russian Minister of Internal Affairs, Vladimir Kokoltsev, was forced to sign an ordinance lifting the ban on filming in police departments.

The journalists' last publication was an investigation into a suspected protection racket by Moscow Region police against a funeral business in the Ramenskoye district.

The night of July 29, 2020, Katelevsky and Dorogov were detained at the home of an acquaintance by a Rapid Response Unit of 20 fighters. Dorogov wound up in hospital with injuries to his spine and abdomen. Katelevsky suffered an injury to his right ear and went deaf for two days.

Katelevsky's YouTube channel was then taken down. He and Dorogov were later charged under Article 163 of the Russian Criminal Code ("extortion on a large scale by an organized group"). The investigators alleged that the two journalists had extorted 1.5 million rubles from a traffic policeman in exchange for not publishing a defamatory story about him.

Several other criminal cases were opened against Katelevsky and Dorogov. They pled not guilty to all charges.

On November 17, 2023, Yan Katelevsky and Alexander Dorogov were sentenced to 9.5 years and 10.5 years, respectively, in a strict-regime penal colony.

Good afternoon, Grigory Shalvovich!

I'm immensely grateful for and delighted by your letter and support. Thank you very much for your labor, and not only literary. Your books create personalities out of ordinary people, revealing their facets. Your works are amazing for the depth of thought and their message, and the quality of the research that goes into their preparation... I have such admiration!!! Sitting in a dark courthouse box, the size of a large deep grave, with a missing window and a locked iron door with no handle and no keyhole to remind you that you decide nothing here, I'm writing on my knee a reply to your letter.

1. People often ask who I am, and I often reply: a carpenter with an eighth-grade education, born and raised

in Ramenskoye, in the Moscow Region. I hate liars, scoundrels, and injustice. I'm not apathetic and cannot walk by when lawlessness occurs. I became a journalist out of necessity, so as to bring justice to the masses.

2. I believe in people. It's strange, of course, but having been behind bars in pre-trial detention for nearly four years, having shared a cell with different defendants, I still see humanity in them, even if it's sometimes very poorly developed. I believe that they can make amends, that they should be given a chance and helped, not labeled and treated as social pariahs.

3. It's an interesting question (what do I rely on to make decisions), even an awkward one. Example. Mind: Are you crazy?! They'll either kill us or jail us if we go public with this investigative report. Look at who it exposes, the crooks at the very top! The whole thing puts my stomach in a knot. But now another protagonist appears: Wait a minute, if nothing is done, these scoundrels will be abusing your descendants and compatriots for a very long time. Look around you. Will anyone else do what you're doing? They tremble at the

mere mention of fighting for their rights! Come on, help them and yourself, open their eyes, remove their blinders, dispel their fear of those in power. Burn! Now the mind changes horses and begins to support the inner provocateur. No matter what, you do what you have to, in the name of the future, a bright future, against filth and evil. Good must win. Period.

4. To me, the most important things in life are truth, justice and democracy. All the rest, thanks to the above-mentioned tools, can be achieved independently.

5. Communication with loved ones, solitude, and access to information bring me the greatest joy.

6. What saddens me most is the unwillingness of society to assert its rights; the slave mentality; and people's unwillingness to take responsibility for their actions.

7. The greatest evil to man and mankind is brought by people themselves, not wanting to look at things sensibly; instead they switch on "super-parasite" mode, and so destroy everything and everyone around them (selfishness).

8. The greatest benefit is brought by creative people who make things, whether it's a nuclear reactor, a news-

paper article, a sci-fi novel, a new movie or a smartphone program. Individuality, autonomy, critical thinking, and self-expression are a benefit and a boon to the world.

9. The arts that most influence me are movies and literature, followed by music. Though I'm colorblind, I can appreciate the beauty of the emotions conveyed to the viewer in films (including cartoons).

10. I don't have any favorite quotes, but a quote from a good friend, an older friend to whom the nickname "Sensei" stuck, is very memorable: "Always cover your rear with buoys so that no creep can get near you." It's very vivid, I think, and suits all occasions.

11. I read a lot of books as a child: in the 90's my mother worked in a bookstore. I had unlimited access to contemporary literature, and nothing distracted me then. I was most struck by [Bradbury's] *Fahrenheit 451* and [Orwell's] *1984*. My eyes opened, the blinders fell away, and the rose-colored glasses didn't work since I can't see red.

12. I don't have any role models. I don't want to be like anyone else.

13. Russia today? A good fit would be a quote from that movie with Abdulov and Leonov (I don't remember what it's called, unfortunately): "The dragon is dead, long live the dragon!"

With best regards,

Ya.N.

Yury Vitalievich KORNY (b. 1969)



Moved to Moscow from Magadan. Started a YouTube channel about the hardships of life in Russia. Supporter of Artpodgotovka, a socio-political movement created by opposition politician V.V. Maltsev. The night of October 12, 2017, Yury Korny, Andrei Tolkachev and Andrei Keptya were detained on charges of planning to set fire to pallets of hay and stage sets left on Manezhnaya Square in Moscow

after a city festival held that day. REN-TV reported that the three activists were caught decanting gasoline. In addition, leaflets and seven one-liter plastic bottles of a combustible mixture were allegedly found in their possession. (See also Ozerov, p. 265)

Yury Korny was later charged under Article 205 of the Russian Criminal Code (“preparing to commit a terrorist act in collusion with a group of persons”) and Article 205.4 (“participation in a terrorist community”). Artpodgotovka had been recognized on October 26, 2017, as “extremist”.

On July 18, 2020, Korny was sentenced to 10 years in a strict-regime penal colony.

Grigory, hello! My name is Yuri. I received from you heartfelt words of support and understanding. They immediately revealed to me intuitively, in a Kantian way, the depth of your sentient views and perceptions. Your solidarity identifies with those highly moral standards that

were inherent in people of a different, long-gone era, culture and civilization. People of high personal organization! Thank you for that! You, Grigory (it's very inconvenient that I don't know your patronymic. Please send it to me) have manifested yourself in my existence in a very necessary and timely way. This convergence already has meanings and potencies. We can format them in a maxim. If, of course, your algorithm remains unchanged. Much of what I have generated has been accumulated; I have a lot to say to you and to be enriched by you.

In order for you to accurately understand and perceive my personality, I will immediately answer your twelfth question of those quite meaningful and timely ones you propose. I will be concise, as concise as I can, because of the shortage of sheets of paper. So! In question No. 12, the dominant theme is man as a "model." There is such a man! It's my own father! He is not so much a model for me as an [image]¹. Because it is his image in me (I mean exactly that—"in me") that has remained and has carried me through my entire deformed life. I have only the

¹ The square brackets, in this case, are the author's (Yury Korny's).

memory of my father. It has been preserved with a trembling fear of forgetting something, of leaving something out. In my younger years, I tried in vain to stir up this memory in my brain and add to it, expand it. However, the fragments in my memory were like puzzles: those that latched on and remained would not be added to by anything. But these very few fragments and snippets were still enough for me to understand, recognize and remember the exact and clear image of my real Father; to know his inner world. His will, his core, his genetic essence! It manifested itself in everything he did. I have always remembered one of the last moments of our happy life together—I was four or five at the time—a simple and ordinary incident, but not quite! We went for a walk on the shore of the newly opened Northern River. We came to the water's edge by a road cut by a bulldozer right through the woods. I guess my father wanted to be alone, both with himself and with me. And to show me the beauty of the northern spring nature. Suddenly he looked to his left, there was a bear standing on a bank of cut earth. He was 5-7 meters away, no more. He was thin and dirty. It was obvious that he had just woken up. He looked at us angrily and wickedly. He was evaluating us. My father took a few steps *andante*, so that I'd be behind him. He spoke and I

remembered his words: “Don’t run!” I didn’t think of running. I was not yet afraid. Fear came with time. When, gazing with my eyes, I began to realize the savagery and malice of the beast, my father slowly and casually took a cigarette case out of his left trouser pocket, calmly pulled out matches, took out a cigarette. At the same time, he took a big step with his right foot in the direction of the bear, followed by half a step with his left. In this position my father stood half-turned and began to light a cigarette, as if he had come out of a movie and decided to smoke. The bear stood and watched, watching my father and definitely glancing at me. We didn’t stand like that for long. My father took two or three drags, he hardly exhaled any smoke. Only later in life, when I was an adult who had met bears many times and knew everything about them, did I look back on our meeting and realize how precisely and smartly my father had acted! Any wrong move on his part and that vicious beast would have torn us apart and even split our bones. The bear is a very good psychologist. He calculates both the person and the situation. He assesses the odds. And he’s good at sensing fear. That time the bear went away. And I understood the nature of things. Not right away. But I did. And when I was followed through the Alexander Garden [by Manezhnaya Square in Moscow], I didn’t run. I stood there! Behind me, 12,000 kilometers

away, stood my son. Now, if ever he meets a beast, I know he won't run away! What my father's work was, I don't know. I know who he was. He was not a particle or an element in "living matter." He was the living matter itself!

Let me go on to the question of an "important book". [No. 11.] The most important book to me is General A.I. Denikin's *Russian Turmoil. Memoirs: Military, Social, and Political* (3 vols.). There's another book—not important to me, but valuable: S.S. Oldenburg's *The Last Tsar: Nicholas II. His Reign and His Russia*. It's not even a work book, but more for the soul. Although there's very little of the soul in it. As for Denikin's book, I managed to get it from the library in Lefortovo [prison]. Found it by chance. I didn't read it, I took notes. Much, unfortunately, was lost during my transfers from one prison to another. But I managed to hang onto some of my notes. I've kept them safe and sound for many years now. I refer to them whenever I need to write something. I also try to compare details in Denikin and Oldenburg, especially as concerns the relationship between the sovereign and his generals. The most mysterious figure for me is General [Mikhail Vasilyevich] Alekseyev. How many people did he work for besides the Tsar? It was from Denikin's book that I learned about General Nikolai Nikolayevich Dukhonin. In fact, I learned about many people and things.

There's one more book that's engraved on my heart, not anodically, but cathodically. It is *Ubiystvo Tsarskoi Semi. Iz zapisok sudebnogo sledovatelya N.A. Sokolova* [Murder of the Tsar's Family. From the notes of forensic investigator N.A. Sokolov]. I've read it, written about it, studied it, even changed the way I read it. This is my way of saying that I worked with it quite meticulously and, on that basis, wrote a review. In which I completely refute everything that happened from March 9, 1917, onward. Of course, this may be my dilettantism. However, logic and objectivism cannot be avoided. And in my review, everything is based on that. By analyzing in detail all the events in Tsarskoye Selo, in Tobolsk, and of course in Yekaterinburg, I logically substantiate that [Sokolov's version] is, most likely, an obvious fabrication. Take, for example, the not completely burned trinkets, vials, hair clips and the like. The theatricality of the entire picture created in the Ipatiev House [where Nicholas II and his family were confined for several months and then executed], the illusions are plain to see. Explicit and unambiguous, it seems to me. And indeed, was the book itself really based on Sokolov's investigations, on what he collected? Aberrations and even forgeries can be discerned. What really happened to the [Tsar's] family? I think we won't know for a long time. But to recapitulate the theme of the [most important] book, if I had not wound up in Lefortovo, I might never have learned about [Denikin's] *Russian Turmoil*. And this would have impoverished my

worldview in the extreme. How much more is there to discover?!

Good luck and health to you. Write.

Konstantin Andreyevich KOCHANOV (b. 1997)



Muscovite; married; has a small child; worked as an electrician. Konstantin Kochanov has been charged under Article 213 of the Russian Criminal Code (“Hooliganism committed on grounds of political hatred”, punishable by up to five years in prison) and Article 214 (“Vandalism”, punishable by up to a year in prison). Kochanov was detained on May 9, 2023. He was initially jailed for 15 days for

an alleged administrative offense (“disobeying the lawful demands of a police officer”). A week later, on May 16, a criminal case was opened against him.

According to the investigation, on the night of May 8-9 [Victory Day eve], Kochanov painted several red crosses on the asphalt in central Moscow. There were at least three of them: two crosses in Bolshoi Kozlovsky Lane and one in Nizhnyaya Krasnoselskaya Street. The crosses measured no more than one square meter. The function of these crosses was explained variously in the media: some outlets said the crosses were marks for attacking Ukrainian drones, others said they were geodesic marks. The latter version was later refuted on the grounds that Kochanov had nothing to do with geodesy. There were also suggestions in the media that the police initially refused to open a criminal case, but then did so.

According to the investigation, Kochanov's crosses expressed "his disagreement with Russia's Special Military Operation in Ukraine"; by painting them on the asphalt in central Moscow he "created a real threat of undermining the security of the state and further threatened to cause harm to the life and health of citizens."

The Memorial Human Rights Center found "no sign of criminally punishable hooliganism, including the motive of hatred and enmity, in Kochanov's actions, since the anti-war motive is, in fact, the motive of protest against the hatred and enmity accompanying war."

1. I am the protagonist of my life, my story, my conscience.
2. I believe in the human soul, in God.
3. When making the most important decisions, I rely on both my reason and my gut feeling. I believe that in such cases, you have to act according to the golden mean.
4. To me, the most important thing is the health and well-being of my family and friends.
5. What brings me the most joy is my child's smile and joy.
6. I feel saddest when I'm unable to fulfill a promise made to my family.
7. In my opinion, the greatest evil is brought by greed, envy, and indifference.

8. The greatest benefit is brought by mutual understanding and a willingness to help.

9. I think that of all the art forms, architecture has the most effect on me.

10. My favorite quote is from Professor [Juri] Lotman: “Man is always in an unforeseen situation, and here he has two legs: conscience and intellect.”

11. There is no most important book for me, since I’ve read very few of them.

12. In thinking about who is a role model for me, I realized that I don’t have one. Maybe that’s a good thing.

13. To me, Russia is my homeland, which I love, where I was born and grew up, and for which I wish a better future and the correction of past mistakes.

Vladislav Vladislavovich KRAVAL
(b. 1975)



Lived in the city of Ukhta (Komi Republic). Eco-activist. Worked as a builder and repaired flats. The night of June 19, 2022, Kraval took two cans of left over white and blue paint to the local House of Culture on which hung a banner inscribed with a giant militarist “Z” and “For Victory”. He wrote: “Fuck the War.” And slipped away unseen. On September 25, 2022, Kraval called the Ukhta military enlistment office, made a false re-

port of planned arson there, and hung up. Shortly before, he had seen the name of his elder son, an asthmatic, on a list of those to be mobilized for the war in Ukraine. On September 27, he was detained and his apartment was searched. The police found a paint-spattered jacket with a blue-and-white badge on it. (The white-blue-white flag is a symbol of the free Russia of the future.)

Kraval was charged under Article 207 of the Russian Criminal Code (“falsely reporting a terrorist attack for purposes of destabilizing the activities of the authorities”). He was also charged under Article 214 (“vandalism motivated by political hatred”): the investigation said Kraval had defaced the Z banner because of his “disagreement with the state’s conduct of the Special Military Operation and mobilization.” In December 2022, Kraval was transferred to house arrest. In May 2023, he was again taken into custody.

On June 6, 2023, Kraval was sentenced to six years and three months in a general-regime penal colony.

1. I'm a romantic rebel.
2. I believe in love, and I don't believe in justice.
3. In making decisions I mostly rely on my gut feeling. I call this "my instinct". And it—I don't know if this is unfortunate, or the other way around—usually prevails over my reason. More accurate would be to say that my gut feeling is the engine for a well-considered decision.
4. Despite the way I've described myself, the most important thing to me is my family. And values associated with it.
5. What brings me the most joy is the joy and happiness of my loved ones. Joy in the eyes of the people I help. I like to give gifts. That too is a joy.
6. I'm saddened by betrayal.
7. Ignorance and intolerance bring the greatest evil to mankind.
8. The greatest benefit? Knowledge... Selflessness, i.e. love.
9. Of the arts, literature and painting.

10. My favorite Ray Bradbury quote is: “Don’t let them take your crying, turn it upside down and use it for their own smile!”

11. The books that are important to me, I probably haven’t read yet. But there are plenty of favorites, or ones that struck a nerve. The most recent being Ray Bradbury’s *Dandelion Wine*. Such a sip of summer and childhood. I enjoyed every page in prison. What a marvelous book!

12. I consider my father a role model. The way he made decisions and his ability to defend their correctness and necessity. I also inherited from him the ability to analyze and draw the right conclusions.

13. What is Russia to me today? My Russia is sitting in prison. Russia is drones, camouflage nets and trench candles. Unfortunately.

With kind and warm regards,

Vladislav

Alexander Viktorovich KRAICHIK (b. 1990)



Lived in the town of Solikamsk (Perm Krai) before moving to Moscow in 2011. He worked at a bank. On April 11, 2023, an FSB officer came to see Kraichik at his workplace and took his cell phone. Five days later he was taken off a flight to Istanbul on charges of “petty hooliganism”. The police claimed Kraichik had been seen “swearing and waving his arms” at Vnukovo Airport. On release

from jail 15 days later, he was re-arrested on charges of “disobeying a police officer”. In June 2023, after a fourth administrative arrest, Kraichik was criminally charged: on February 26, 2022, he had transferred 50 euro to an account in Deutsche Bundesbank, opened to collect funds for the Ukrainian Armed Forces. When questioned, he did not deny making the transfer.

Alexander Kraichik now faces up to 20 years in prison under Article 275 of the Russian Criminal Code (“treason”).

1. A human being. This is probably the most abstract definition, but it is also (and maybe that’s why) the most succinct. It is difficult for me to add more to it now.

2. That there is a meaning to life, one universal meaning for all (according to the philosophical faith of

Karl Jaspers), which is therefore able to unite people.

3. Most likely a synthesis of the two. My senses suggest the direction, my reason the path.

4. Strangely enough, I still haven't made up my mind. At this point in time, I really haven't.

5. The feeling that I've made the world a better place. That I've done something useful, elicited a smile—things like that are incredibly valuable, far more valuable than people think.

6. Injustice and impunity.

7. The inability (and/or unwillingness) to hear the other person.

8. A broad outlook and worldview: understanding that the world is not limited to one person.

9. Cinema. I really miss a good movie.

10. [Franklin D.] Roosevelt: "This is a good time to have a beer."

11. Almost everything from Nietzsche.

12. No, there is no such person, only fragments of the stories of various people, people of all different kinds: writers, musicians, politicians, doctors, etc.

13. While in prison, I wrote a book (which I don't yet know how to edit and publish). It is called "Kingdom of Darkness." There's your definition.

Mikhail Alexandrovich KRIGER (b. 1960)



Grew up in Dnipro, Ukraine, USSR. Moved to Moscow in the 1980s. An excavator operator by profession, he was formerly director of his small earthworks company, Ay Da Kriger! More recently, he delivered groceries in his own car. Under Gorbachev, Kriger was a member of a municipal district council in Moscow. For decades he took vociferous part in the democracy and human rights movement. He has been a member

of Solidarity since its inception and of Memorial (Moscow Region chapter). He regularly participated in campaigns to support political prisoners—and was repeatedly subjected to administrative prosecutions for attending rallies and pickets. After Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Kriger consistently and publicly expressed his anti-war position.

On November 3, 2022, by a restaurant in central Moscow where he was delivering groceries, Kriger was thrown to the ground by law enforcers wearing balaclavas. He was detained on charges of “publicly justifying terrorism” (Article 205.2 of the Russian Criminal Code). In January 2023, he was also charged with “public incitement to hatred and enmity” (Article 282).

The basis for the charges against Kriger was the last paragraph of a 2020 Facebook post devoted to the harsh sentence handed down to a couple from Kaliningrad (Antonina Zimina and Konstantin Antonets, see p. 145) convicted of “treason”:

“That’s why Mikhail Zhlobitsky [who set off a bomb in the Arkhangelsk FSB office] is a hero for me. He found the strength to resist. And maybe that guy [Yevgeny Panyurov] who a year ago opened fire on the Lubyanka [Moscow FSB headquarters] on Chekists’ Day. Those bandits don’t understand any other way. It’s as useless to try and persuade them as it is to try and persuade a boa constrictor in the midst of swallowing a rabbit. The only reason I didn’t follow their example is that I’m weak.”

And also this post from 2019: “Friends, those who warn me against being too ‘frank’ with various people. Thank you all so much for your concern. But I’ve said enough as it is. And I’ve never made a secret of my fierce hatred for the regime, for the Chekists who established it, and personally for V.V. Putin. And believe me, when and if I live to see this KGB rotter hanged, I will fight with all my might for the right to participate in that uplifting event.”

On May 17, 2023, Milkhail Kriger was sentenced to seven years in a general-regime penal colony.

I will try to answer Grigory Shalvovich’s questions. True, not all of them. Some I don’t know how to answer.

9. I love songs. To me they are the most important of all arts. I love the songs of Vladimir Vysotsky, Yuli Kim, Bulat Okudzhava, and Vladimir Turyansky. I like to listen to the Nikitin duet [Tatiana & Sergei]. I’m always humming something to myself. Sometimes I “attach” song plots to present-day heroes. For example, I always

associated Vysotsky's song "Kanatokhodets" [Tightrope Walker] ("Look, there he goes without insurance...") with Khodorkovsky when he was arrested [in 2003]. Now I associate it with Navalny. I love a song by the band The Colonel and His Comrades-in-arms with these words: "A man was walking from Orekhovo to Zuevo..." An old friend of mine could have been the prototype. It always seemed to me that that song was written about him. By the way, I must confess that many of the songs I always loved to listen to and sing have become repellent because of the current Special Military Operation [in Ukraine]. The many military songs I loved from childhood and listened to over and over again, I cannot bear to listen to now. I realize that's unfair, but I can't do anything about it.

10. I like very much Winston Churchill's pronouncement: "Democracy is by far the worst form of government. But all the others are even worse..." (I'm quoting from memory, so apologize if I've slightly twisted it). The most interesting thing is that before discovering Churchill's aphorism, I had thought it was my own...) I also try to be guided by the rule "Do what you have to do, and if it works it works." True, it doesn't always work. I also like this rule: "Don't ask what your country (America in the origi-

nal) can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.”

12. My role models include Janusz Korczak, the greatest of heroes. And Giordano Bruno. And now, of course, Alexei Navalny. Despite my skepticism about his possible methods of government. There are also people in my circle whom I consider saints, literally. I am very happy to know them. Incidentally, Yelena Kostyuchenko, Yelena Milashina, Anna Politkovskaya, and Natalia Estemirova are all great role models. I would say the same about Dmitry Muratov and Igor Kalyanin. And those are just the ones that come to mind right off the bat.

13. Unfortunately, today it’s the “Evil Empire” all over again. Something like the Third Reich. Run by the same sort of Führer. I’m also reminded of stories like “The Monster Cockroach” by Kornei Chukovsky. The atmosphere is like that in my favorite movie “To Kill the Dragon” (based on the play by Evgeny Schwartz). A time of triumphant meanness.

That’s how it is.

With best regards,

Mikhail

Daniil Dmitrievich KRINARI (b. 1988)



Lived in St. Petersburg. Artist. On September 24, 2022, ahead of rallies across Russia to protest mobilization, the apartments of Daniil Krinari and other activists in St. Petersburg were searched in connection with a case of “knowingly making a false report of a terrorist attack” (Article 207 of the Russian Criminal Code). Krinari and at least six others were sent to a detention center for two days and

then released as suspects in the case. On December 21, 2022, Krinari was detained in the Belarusian city of Grodno and extradited to Moscow. He was charged with cooperating with a foreign government (Article 275.1) — Ukraine. His wife denies the charges. She believes that Krinari is being prosecuted for having run a Telegram channel.

Thank you very much for your warm and sincere words of support! Just the idea of your project filled me with enthusiasm! I took my time answering. Every question in the questionnaire makes you think about a lot of things.

I hope very much that your readers will be as interested in my answers as I am in the questions themselves. They are really philosophical, and would

likely be relevant in any era, but especially in this one.

You're absolutely right: "It is important today to change the attitude of Russian society towards political prisoners." After all, it's not just a matter of sympathy for the fate of those imprisoned for their beliefs. Today we are living through a truly dramatic and in many ways tragic period of our history. And what is happening is largely the result of years of indifference and misunderstanding by a significant part of society about what is going on.

Thank you for covering this topic, for disseminating information, and providing the public with an alternative view of the situation.

Like you, I can't help but believe that "the darkness will dissipate" and that I, like all of Russia, will be free!

1. Who am I? This is a question each of us must answer sooner or later. First and foremost, for ourselves.

I believe that the most important thing is to be a human being, and then everything else will, as they say, fall into place. it. In a global sense, this means not just living

for the sake of satisfying one's own primary needs. Unlike other living beings, man has been given from on high and by his very nature the opportunity not just to live, but to at least try to change the surrounding reality, the world, for the better. It is by pursuing this global goal that man remains a Human Being. The worst thing, in my opinion, is to lose oneself. To simply "go with the flow" and, as a result, inevitably become "dehumanized". Life is one big quest, endlessly testing and trying our ability to remain a human being. I must have understood this even as a child. If I was afraid of anything, it was only living my life in vain.

Among my many aspirations and hobbies, I predictably chose art as my craft. I'm a fashion designer by training. I graduated from the St. Petersburg Stieglitz State Academy of Art and Design.

An artist is not just someone who can leave a mark on paper or canvas. First of all, an artist is an idealist who strives to elevate everything to the maximum, to the ideal. The artist tends to idealize everything, from his own beliefs and aesthetic preferences to everything around him. His

task is not simply to “reproduce the beautiful”. When he sees imperfection in something, he cannot come to terms with it; instead he strives to transform it, to correct it. I wouldn’t dare assume the grand title of “artist in the broad sense of the word”. Rather, I’ve been striving for it all my life.

I look back, to childhood, where it’s worth searching for many of the answers to why we end up becoming what we do. It was, you could say, the textbook childhood of a “child of the 90s”. The then terrible, criminal Kazan, where I was born and raised. Most of my peers had something to do with the organized crime that was tearing the city apart, imposing its own “unwritten” laws and rules by which the whole society had to live.

As a child from a family of teachers, academics, and artists, I could not of course be part of this system of horror. I could not and did not want to be. I actively resisted, defending my beliefs and principles based on the classical notion of good and evil, justice and mayhem, etc.

I held out then—and I’ll hold out now. I think I’ve clearly explained with this bit of past history how I feel

about the state of affairs today.

2. What do I believe in? I believe in my star, in my destiny, in my mission. I believe in the best things and in the best people—I'm not disappointed in people. Tough times test a lot of people, acting as a kind of "litmus paper". Without exaggeration, many of my contemporaries deserve admiration, many of them can be looked up to. Being here, I receive letters, words of support from the very best and most sincere people. I'm not afraid for myself or for the future of the whole country, if such people still remain.

3. What has happened in recent years has spoiled everything and broken all logic. Life today, and even more so the future of every one of us, is an "equation with many unknowns". Therefore, it is impossible to make the most important, fateful decisions guided only by logic. I am listening more and more to my inner voice. Some may wonder how I wound up behind bars; they may think that my logic and my inner voice were poor guides. But I knew that sooner or later this would catch up with to me and that I must go through it with dignity. Just because I'm me. No,

I hadn't prepared for this. For this, it's impossible to be ready. But it was my inner voice that seemed to be warning me. Put it this way: if they hadn't found this excuse [to arrest me], sooner or later they would have found another, and I would still be here. Unless I had evacuated in advance and gone far away for a long time.

We can all see the writing on the wall.

Today I rely on fate, on providence and, of course, on God. Again, going back to my path in life: many different things have happened to me. For some reason, life has always been in the spirit of an adventure novel. But if I was in trouble, something always saved me and rescued me. I hope it will be the same this time.

4. The most important thing in life is life itself, with all its joys and sorrows. It's important not to lose your positive outlook on the world, to be able to withstand a blow and turn seemingly hopeless losses and defeats into Victories.

5. Being here, you learn to enjoy every little thing, so that almost anything that has at least some redeeming aspect and somehow breaks out of the monotony of absolutely identical and endless days makes you happy.

In general, the happiest things in prison life are the hopes and dreams that come true and the goals that are achieved. Nothing motivates you to keep going as much as having passed through another stage of life. But the most joyful thing is when there is someone to share the joy of achievements with, when you and your victory are shared. Just as even the most delicious dish will not be so tasty if you eat it alone. Just as joy is incomplete if there is no one to share it with.

6. What most saddens me is people's indifference. I even ask myself if I'm not too biased in my perception. But no. It is indeed the most woeful phenomenon of our time, out of which all other misfortunes grow.

People are always driven by two basic principles: the desire to acquire something new always fights with the need to preserve what they already have. A significant part (if not most) of our society is not even just indifferent to what is happening or unconcerned. Their behavior is largely dictated from above, the main motivational principle being fear. Fear of losing what little they have.

Those few things—in fact, the most basic goods. Thus, society and the authorities are in a “tacit collusion” where the former sell their loyalty to the latter for very little.

7. The greatest evil is the primitivization of meanings. A formulaic and stereotypical view of certain phenomena, especially when this process is actively cultivated by someone “at the top”.

If the human brain ceases, for some reason, to understand, analyze and think, it gradually loses the ability to generate its own solutions, consequently depriving its owner of the ability to act independently. Looking back on history, all the most frightening, terrible things for mankind happened when people’s questions quickly found an unequivocal answer which, to a large extent, had been foisted on them by someone with an axe to grind.

People’s consciousness was always prepared ahead of time: everything was divided into “black and white”. Then, at the decisive moment, people and society were activated. To manage this at the decisive moment, you need only make the “black” even blacker and the “white” even whiter.

All religious wars began with the Crusades. The terror and blood of all revolutions, clashes of civilizations, xenophobia, revanchist, revisionist ideas (such as Nazism) are contingent on just such simple meanings, easily understood by the majority, on “uploading” these meanings into people’s consciousness, and... on activating the mechanisms at the right moment with the help of catalysts or triggers. This is why the battle for souls, hearts and minds is so important. If people are not motivated to think critically, to create their own meanings, to come to their own conclusions and beliefs, this void will sooner or later be filled by someone who wants to exploit it for their own insidious interests.

8. For the greatest benefit, see the previous question. My answer would be the same, but the exact opposite. That is, the greatest benefit to mankind comes of the ability and desire to think.

9. Of all the arts, music probably has most powerful effect on me. Although, in my opinion, no art form exists on its own. Any art exists in the context of time and events, of cultural, aesthetic, ideological paradigms and codes.

At one time, I chose my profession precisely because of my passion for art, music and history. For me today, music is something like a pill with boosted vitamins and active ingredients, which helps one to quickly achieve a certain emotional state, which, in its turn, helps one solve certain problems in life. That is why I, if I can put it this way, have always “used” the widest array of “musical injections”, from symphonic classics to modern electronic jazz, depending on the needs and problems of the moment.

10. A favorite quote, maxim or guide to action. There are, as we know, things that are temporary and things that are permanent. There’s an ideologeme that occurred to me when I was a student, but has really become relevant now: “You can take many things away, but not me from me.”

I hope this truth will not always be the sole defining one of my life, that the temporary will give way to the permanent. For me, that permanent truth is a quote from Thomas Jefferson:

“The God, who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time: the hand of force may destroy, but cannot disjoin them.”

11. It would be difficult to name just one book that is the most important for me. Again, we are formed as individuals in our younger years. For me, childhood was the classic adventure novels of Walter Scott, Mayne Reid, and Jules Verne.

As we move on to the next question about role models, I would like to note that biographies of remarkable, celebrated people and historical figures have most likely had a decisive influence on me.

Perhaps the most significant such book was the biography of Napoleon Bonaparte by the famous Soviet historian A. Z. Manfred. In any case, when it fell into my hands in high school, I read it several times, as they say, “from cover to cover”. In my youth, the image of this historical figure was a defining one for me, a role model. Napoleon’s diligence, determination, mastery over his own fears and weaknesses made me sincerely admire him. But the main thing that attracted me to him was his ability to

resist superior forces out to destroy him as a person. It was to him (then a cadet at the Military School in Brienne) that an arrogant instructor once put the question: “Who are you?” [Eleven-year-old] Napoleon replied: “I am a man.” This is above all titles, awards and regalia— something we are born with, but something that many people, without realizing it, voluntarily renounce. By the way, going back to the previous question, one of my favorite Napoleon quotes is: “A man’s personality is measured by his destiny, not by his nature.”

12. Today, I do not seek to emulate anyone. To orient myself, to compare approaches to certain things, yes. I seem to be gradually moving from my ardent, ambitious youth to maturity. The image of Napoleon is gradually yielding to that of another, no less prominent figure: Winston Churchill. At their core, at their base, these individuals are similar in many ways. Ambition, the search for fame and recognition are peculiar to both of them. But Churchill, unlike Napoleon, managed to curb his own passions and ambition, forcing his talents, capabilities and energy to serve the public good.

13. What is Russia to me today?

This is probably one of the most difficult questions, and not just for me. Many different answers exist from many different people, and most are true. But the universal truth of “what is this Russia” is much more difficult to define.

To me, it is definitely not a concept based on geographical boundaries, territory or statehood with all its paraphernalia. Russia is first of all a spiritual, mental unit. A society. A cultural, historical and informational space, which has an extraterritorial character. That is, first and foremost, it is people. At the same time, the distinctive feature is not the possession of a Russian Federation passport.

From the very beginning of the New Russia, since the collapse of the Soviet Union [in 1991], the concept of “Russia” has been very heterogeneous. Territories, ethnicities and social groups are often absolute opposites. In recent years, these tendencies have only intensified, and with the beginning of [Putin’s] so-called Special Military Operation [in Ukraine], society has become even more ideologically divided, despite the officially declared “picture of national cohesion and unity”. Nevertheless,

these people, despite their sometimes diametrically opposed beliefs, remain in this single metaphysical space and concept—“Russia”.

Today is a time of new challenges, and it is important to understand where our strengths lie, our advantages, to understand the concept itself of the coexistence of such different people, territories, and ethnicities.

As it happens, this is not the first time in our history that the officially proclaimed slogans and the narratives declared by people in high places do not explain the true goals and objectives of [ordinary] people’s existence as a united nation under the state—and often contradict them.

Today we hear a lot about these phantom notions—“the Russian world”, “the special Russian path”. They are presented as some kind of global concept designed to unite everyone and explain everything to everyone. In reality, however, this is the same primitivization and “flattening of meaning” that I mentioned earlier. Seemingly honorable ideals in simple self-evident phrases acquire a completely different meaning in practice, serving to legitimize deeds that are not at all good. But most people do not pick up on

this substitution since their consciousness was formed long before and in a certain direction. For this phenomenon, I recently coined the term: “people with an explained consciousness.” They do not need to think for themselves: everything was explained to them long ago. At the same time, they cease to notice the reality, that the essence of present-day Russia is again as Chekhov once described it: “the arrogance and idleness of the strong, the ignorance and bestiality of the weak.” The semantic load of official slogans has only one goal: to create, under any pretext, a “Great Nation of insignificant people”, as they did once before...

The creation of a permanent external threat to society for the sake of social cohesion around the state is not a new methodology, and can hardly be considered a promising concept for Russia’s development in the future. At the same time, Russia has been and remains a country of great potential, whose main strategic resource is not its vast territories or fossil fuels. Its principal asset is people. We will be able to realize these possibilities and make use of these advantages only if we have a good understanding of who we really are. What are the true aims and purposes of

our existence as a unified nation, state, and country? It is only by separating the wheat from the chaff that we will find our way into the future. Contrary to popular belief, the most active, educated, and enterprising part of society is quite conscious and ready for this, ready, first of all, to become masters of their own fate and life.

I believe in Russia's future. But what that future will be, what Russia itself and everyone's place in it will be depends only on us. On each and every one of us.

P.S. As I said at the beginning, I myself was very interested to see what my answers to your questions would be. For the first time in a long time, I thought about what our main trouble is, Russia's principal and unsolved problem. In a nutshell, it turns out to be indifference and not taking responsibility for one's life. So instead of an afterword, here's a poem I wrote on this topic. Perhaps it will cause those who are indifferent to at least think again.

Not your thoughts and ways,
You have no hand at all in this,
You can only travel this road,
With your soul hidden in your body.

The bell has yet to toll for you,
You watch, and wash your hands,
Still untouched by so much
Suffering, grief and separation.

All men are distant, but related,

Yet brother will not fight for brother
And in the uncaring majority,
Culprits are easily found.

The centuries race in at a gallop,
Dashing about in search of wealth,
Grow old / die / are entombed,
Unlike the Honest Truth.

With best regards and gratitude,
D. Krinari

Pavel Olegovich KRISEVICH (b. 2000)



Born in St. Petersburg. Actionist, artist, author of performances dedicated to political prisoners. Studied at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations and the Lumumba Peoples' Friendship University of Russia. On June 11, 2021, Krisevich walked onto Red Square in Moscow, fired two shots into the air from a deactivated pistol, then shot himself in the head and fell to

the ground. Before shooting, Krisevich delivered a manifesto: "How, amidst the silence of the work of the machine of repression, can we get rid of our fear? Run away? Lay low? We do have one ... one solution for you. <...> The state stigmatizes protest as a crime. Forcing us to introduce ourselves as criminals in prison cells and chat rooms. But what is the state without intimidation? Clearly, it's nothing. <...> Hey! Police state! Future failed state! We'll answer your force and repression with fearlessness! There will be no more fear! Shots will be fired in front of the Kremlin Curtain."

Before Krisevich could get to his feet, police pressed his face to the cobblestones and handcuffed him, then hustled him away. They also detained Nika Samusik, a journalist from the independent news outlet Sota.Vision, who was filming the stunt. Both were taken to the Kitay-gorod police station. Hours later it became known that criminal proceedings had been initiated against them. (Samusik, 19, was released after two days and much publicity.)

On October 18, 2022, Pavel Krisevich was convicted under Article 213 of the Russian Criminal Code (“hooliganism with the use of weapons”) and sentenced to five years in a general-regime penal colony.

First, of course, a huge thank you for your support. It was pleasant and unexpected to receive your letter. I agree that it is worth trying to change the attitude towards political prisoners. Although it seems to me that the more deeply society is scarred by state injustice and, well, a kind of neo-serfdom (I mean that people will be deprived of their former freedom by police measures, restricted in their movement and even mobilized by force), a compassion for political prisoners will awaken of its own accord in people, since this is already embedded in Russians by their Christian values and historical tradition. One of the first books I read in pre-trial detention was Dostoevsky’s *The House of the Dead*, and already in his descriptions, well, in people’s attitude toward the convicts, one can see such an established habit—that of supporting the man in chains. Maybe this was because the whole society was permeated with involuntariness, or maybe this had to do with people’s religiousness, or maybe they were just acting according to

the first rule of morality: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. I don't know, but maybe I'll discover something while answering your questions.

1. I define myself as an artist. Not professionally, but by the way I look at the world. They say that a person manifests his faith by finding his place. When I began to identify as an artist, I saw that that was my place, because it was as if my whole life had been leading up to that. In this capacity, I became aware of new interests and inclinations as well as of opportunities for developing them. And I recognized that I could work not just for my own future, but for the future of those around me. So, yes, I guess with this definition I truly realized that I could serve people, and not just build myself up, as I had been doing while in search of this definition.

2. As for what I believe in, I now have to believe that the solidarity we show will sooner or later lead us all to freedom. You know, everyone who's engaged in this or that form of activism in Russia can't help but keep wondering: will

everything I'm doing lead to at least some changes? I personally was able to answer that question only in prison. Here you feel the emotional space around you more clearly. Every letter, every picket or statement makes the spirit of dissent more and more solid, and the more palpable it is, the more it affects society. People have more and more questions about the status quo, more people are beginning to show their solidarity in this quest for freedom and justice. And if, of course, you give up and give in, then exactly nothing will come of it. We're not reaching for material things; by fighting for justice, we are creating thoughts and images of those thoughts. So yes, I believe in the possibility of freedom, that one day everyone will be free to think and move from thoughts to actions that create and build. And even the fact that in today's Russia they're imposing new restrictions, banning words that begin with "W" and surnames that begin with "N" — even that cannot shake my belief. And maybe, thanks to this belief, we can overcome our enslavement.

3. As for what I rely on when making the most important decisions, probably my reason. Since it always has the last word. As an example, take the idea for the performance for which I'm now in prison ["committing

suicide” on Red Square]. The plan occurred to me all of a sudden. I had had the persistent feeling that in the coming months we would all lose our former freedom to express a position at odds with that of the state, whatever it might be. Then the idea came to me from on high that no one had ever shot themselves in the head on Red Square before, and that this would be the best way to reflect my persistent feeling. Still, I left the final decision to rationality. Was this necessary? Would it have an impact? Was it feasible? So here I had an important decision to make—it was a reasoned gut feeling.

4. With the weight of time served, the most important thing is freedom, which is also a consequence of the belief I described above. Though here I would say freedom not for me, because I have learned what extreme unfreedom is, but for close friends, acquaintances and really everyone. For everyone to have this freedom and never once in their lives be deprived of it. In New York City there’s an artist, Tehching Hsieh, who explores the edges of unfreedom in his performances. For example, he forbids himself to enter buildings for a year, etc. And in the experience that the author derives from his performance, even in the description, one can feel the abyss when a person is deprived of at least part of the vastness of possibilities.

Most important to me is that more people be able to use any skill they have, and be able to go wherever they want to go. This is utopianism, of course, but it has a practical point: the possibility to live and create without censorship and surveillance by people in uniform is the key value to fight for. For in this freedom or struggle for it, something valuable can emerge, not only cultural objects, but also love, humanity, and relationships in which everyone is fair to each other.

5. My long confinement has made me realize that the greatest joy for me is when those around me are not standing still, but living their lives freely, filling their time with memories, achievements, etc. Maybe that's because I'm not living a full life myself right now. But if you only knew how heartening it is to hear from people that they finally wrote that article / traveled abroad / got married. It also reassures me that life on the outside hasn't stopped, and since it hasn't, I can still hope for freedom.

6. What saddens me is when the cage of limitations becomes materially visible. You see a person in front of you,

you see his impulses and dreams, but you also notice how this cage gnaws at him. That he can't realize himself because of these limitations, whether it's money or harmful habits. I'd probably be scared to see a person burn out. In my imagination, I instantly see above that person's head a blossom of connections suddenly severed, like in [Stephen] King's *Insomnia*. And then I see the withering away of a whole trove of memories, dreams, relationships, and I begin to feel apprehensive.

7. Well, I think it's the feeling that another person can be your slave. It brings evil to the person [who feels that way] in denying his human nature and also stops humanity from discovering its ever-increasing potential. Because if a man is a slave, he won't be able to give most of his ideas to mankind unless his master lets him. Reading in Klyuchevsky [*A History of Russia*] about how serfdom was imposed on Muscovy fills me with disgust already on page two. That back then rights were worth less than a draught animal. But such is the course of history. Serfdom degenerated on its own, and in the 19th century we have more and more examples of famous artists who were bought out of serfdom, giving them and culture a future.

But yes, the evil that sees a person as a piece of property is characteristic of today's State and of certain people. We still have to eradicate the very possibility and the idea that you can trample other people's rights.

8. The complete opposite of this evil, in my opinion, brings the greatest benefit. A situation where human destiny is not confined inside a frame (like this form I'm filling out, where you reduce the scale in advance so as to fit into the space allotted), but where a person can see his or her own path in anything and follow it, building a destiny based on his or her unique way of thinking.

9. Of the arts, music has the strongest effect on me, but only if I listen to it with headphones and without external stimuli. I've noticed more and more often that when I'm so caught up in what I'm listening to, my speech, my train of thought, even my writing style, reflect the rhythm of the music. No other art has had such a strong influence on me.

10. Rather than mangle the Latin, I'll give you a translation: "Shining a light on others, I burn myself." This has been my attitude since high school, when in

Social Studies we were asked to choose a Latin maxim that reflected us. I later used this maxim as my status on social networks—until I replaced it with all sorts of jokes and post-irony. But as a result, it's the only maxim I somehow remember and can identify with.

11. Well, it was Pelevin's *Secret Views of Mount Fuji*, because with this book I discovered contemporary prose. Before that, I had only read the classics, and reading didn't fascinate me enough to be always with a book. No, of course I was always with a book, but it was something from political economy, Trotsky's articles, [Lenin's] *The State and Revolution*—I saw this philosophy as a means of being accepted by my peer group and of understanding the world around me. But my meaningful reading started with Pelevin. With him I started reading all the contemporary classics; my way of life was largely built on their works, and their line of thought. I can even say to my generation that, in order to understand the world around us, philosophy may not help. Philosophy supplies a form and an image of this world, which is filled with colors and meanings by the work of contemporary prose. Not all of it, naturally. Pelevin, Sorokin, and Elizarov helped me a lot.

12. [Russian revolutionary] Boris Savinkov somehow became such a figure for me, even though he was involved in terrorism. He became interesting to me because, amidst the storm of contradictions and ideological conflicts, he tried to find the true path of justice. His confession in *The Black Horse* reveals him as a man forced to be a prisoner of uniforms and [political] camps. But he couldn't stand it: he wanted to sweep it all away and beat out of those uniform-imposers freedom and justice for all. I think many of those in the Special [Military] operation [in Ukraine] are in a similar position. Savinkov is also important because the force he chose later in life—gunpowder and bombs—proved a failure. We must be like Savinkov, but choose peace.

13. Russia to me is a country on the cusp. Before prison, everything seemed eternal and deafening, now it looks more like a stage set that is about to be changed. In fact, a surprising comparison with the theater occurred to me. What we have now is a real intermission. We can leave the auditorium, not knowing whether we will return, or we can stay and watch the little scene that is being enacted during this intermission, or, if we really want to, we can break up the scene, express our outrage at the per-

formance and sabotage it. Or maybe we should just wait for the first bell. Maybe the second half of the production will be about something different, about justice and not about dictatorship. I think many people dreamed that one day Russia would become amorphous, like clay, and that something different could be molded out of her. Since February 2021 [Navalny was arrested in January 2021], we have become more and more amorphous. The most important thing now is just not to give up on life. To create, to influence, to reject any untruth; with that, maybe, we'll manage to mold something. Even if Russia today is a space where the logical doesn't quite work, here you have a field of emotions and dreams from which a whole epoch will be born, but only when the third bell rings!

Phew, I've cleared my questionnaire debt. Of course, a FSIN [Federal Penitentiary Service] letter is not the most convenient system, like any letter from prison. But it is what it is. I was glad to take part and express some thoughts. Thank you for this opportunity!

With proletarian greetings,

PK!

Dmitry Evgenievich KULIKOV (b. 1965)



In September 2022, Vladivostok resident Dmitry Kulikov was detained by law enforcement on charges of “treason” (Article 275 of the Russian Criminal Code). A report on the search conducted in Kulikov’s apartment alleged that he had passed a photograph of a combined heat and power (CHP) plant to Ukrainian intelligence. (NB: the distance from the eastern-most point in Ukraine to Vladivostok is some 5,000 miles.)

The relative who reported Kulikov’s arrest to OVD-Info, an independent human rights media project, said he had spoken out against the current government in Russia and its war in Ukraine. “Treason” is punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

Good day, Grigory Shalvovich! May I wish you many more years of creativity, fortitude, health and stubbornness, and, as a consequence, financial independence, freedom of opinion and (!?!) distrust. Express doubt, ask questions, uncomfortable and prickly ones. So what if they get angry. Although...

I can’t say I’m a fan of your work. I copied out two or three of your descriptive phrases and saved them. I read some things in a day, other things in a week. In one place I laughed, in another I pondered. My reactions varied. Why

did I read? Because they took away my time for social interactions and gave me back a simulacrum of time for pacing-sitting-sleeping in a cell with people completely alien to me, people I did not choose. In prison there's no question of choice. I remember once, after staring at the ceiling for a long time, I picked up a three-year-old newspaper and read it with keen interest.

I'm apolitical. It's a matter of principle. I don't care who's making the laws for me today. So long as their word is at odds with their deeds. About people like me, they say: it's your own fault, you refused to vote. The man who got elected is doing whatever he likes with you. So why are you complaining now, huh? Stupid sheep!

Your sympathy flatters my fearlessness (as it does other political prisoners like me). But, as it seems to me, this is not about fearlessness. For me, it was the depths of despair and shock that caused me not to accept the "situation". Situation? Yes, it's an unanalyzable delusion that has entered the collective phase. My showing our incompetence and lack of diplomatic tact was perceived as treason against the Motherland. (Here you have official lawlessness and its explanation.) How could you do that? Why? What didn't you have? We have 500 kinds of sausage, cheese for every taste, all kinds of food: you can eat to your heart's content. They forgot about the little old

woman standing just around the corner from the store with her hand outstretched. And about many others. Sell the Motherland!?! Stop! Who said I sold the Motherland? People made me offers, asked about my financial situation. I refused those offers from those Soviet-style creeps from another country, who, like my fellow countrymen, started babbling about patriotism. Here I did not hold back and asked in no uncertain terms that they not touch on that vulgar topic again. To be clear, I asserted that I could show the shambles, the Potemkin curtains masking ruins, the rusty equipment, and untrained personnel. Only later, realizing the foolishness of this correspondence and the impossibility of mutual understanding, did I try to renege on the obligations I had assumed. This led to my immediate arrest. If I had deleted the correspondence, no charges would have been brought without evidence. But if there's no criminal, there's no bonus, no benefits, no stars on the epaulettes, no seniority. How are they supposed to survive? It's not easy for those parasitic do-nothings to try to start working to satisfy their appetites.

I'm not defending my beliefs at the cost of my freedom. This the apparatus does not like—when my underwear with yellow stains and scabs from awkward exertions and rotten food is suddenly in plain sight for all to see.

But what can I do, Grigory Shalvovich?
I'll continue with the questionnaire.

1. How do I define myself? As someone interested in all areas of human endeavor, except politics and global finance. Graphic designer (C+); photographer (B+); plumber; electrician; carpenter; geologist; cyclist (it would be easier to shoot this crowd than to feed it). Who am I? That's for the court to decide. (Just kidding.) I'm a simple hardworking man! Work from morning till evening, sleep at night. In the morning again... I remember in winter once, long ago, I went out in the snowfall to the viaduct to shovel a path so that my wife could safely take our daughter to kindergarten in the morning without slipping. A woman walking by suddenly became indignant: she thought I was a paid sweeper and told me I was doing a bad job. I advised her to keep walking or I'd come after her with my shovel, because I was a pedestrian just like her. She ran away, grumbling under her breath...

2. What do I believe in? Strangely enough, in human beings. So long as they respond and come to one's aid, they are the best thing about humanity.

3. Reason or gut feeling? If it's possible, then I would say a combination of the two. Reason without heart

is the same as heart without reason. Something is bound to go wrong.

4. The main thing in life? Elementary, dear Watson! The main thing in life is always learning. To stick your nose into everything. To climb, jump, crawl, fall in love and hate. And also: a) food; b) shelter; c) friend; d) work; e) peace; f) absence of spongers (this includes children, but that depends on one's ability to bring them up).

5. Joy? Oh, it's a lot of things! Wet sand between my fingers from a wave that rushed in. Dirty sneakers after a hike up a mountain. Beer at our summer cottage after a hard day, with shish kebab. The laughter of my family. The cat sleeping between me and my wife (she's jealous, the bandit). The one successful photograph among a thousand lifeless ones. A pepper plant producing peppers for the second year in a row. My daughter's "Batkovich" and "chmoki-chmoki"; my boss's: "Dmitry Evgenievich, what the f*** is this?"; and my: "Now, now, now! Smile, everyone!"

6. Saddening? Not enough time. I'd like another 300 to 400 years of life. Ideally, 1,000 to 3,000 years. Oh, that would be perfect.

7. What brings evil to mankind? What do you think? The answer is self-evident: humanity is its own evil. Not a word about the weather, pussycats or my mom's feed...

8. With benefits, there's the same problem. Here I suggest we keep quiet about the summer squash. :)

9. Art form? When I was a kid, I was a domestic "spy". I always knew where my mother hid the candy and the forbidden books. Yes, yes! Before perestroika, there was such literature! It included books about artists. Now I realize it was nonsense, but back then my sister and I used to look at the reproductions. Later, when I was older, I looked at Russian artists, and foreign artists, and post-impressionists, and the Hermitage. I can't remember everything. I can't say that I'm a capable artist, only so-so, C+; but handicrafts I love: leather, wood, photos, spices. Once I made tom yum sauce, but I didn't write down the recipe. I'm good friends with spices.

10. At this point in time, the quote: "I lead a highly moral life. But way of life and frame of mind are not the same thing." And also, "What do you do when someone has more money than taste?"

11. Books? How can you compare bread and butter, ham and lettuce? A couple of books here, a couple there, and you've made a magnificent sandwich for your mind...

12. A role model? Yes, I have one. It's silly, of course, but for me, it's me. I hope for others it's them. Why try to be like anyone else?

13. What is Russia to me today? Unfortunately, my life span is too brief to understand my country completely. But what I know is not enough to praise. Not counting the rivers, lakes, fields, and every ear of grain in those fields. It's all mine, my native land... I love everyone in the world! This is my homeland! Stop! I love everyone?! Asia, Europe, Africa, America, Mars, Cassiopeia...

Well, now I've answered this letter. I suspect a lot's been left between the lines. Things that are obvious to me and unknown to others. That happens, too. Look at all the beautiful, strong and determined people around us. We're good, too, but there'll be better ones to come. Isn't that wonderful?

With best regards,
Dmitry

Alexei Sergeyevich KURLOV (b. 1991)



Muscovite. Worked as a loader. Alexei Kurlov is one of 11 people from seven regions of Russia charged in September 2021 under Article 212 of the Russian Criminal Code with “incitement to participation in mass riots” during the State Duma elections (Sept. 17-19, 2021). The defendants (see also Abramov, Nagibin, Sadriyev and Yanochkin) were connected to the “What Is to Be Done!” Telegram

Channel, whose subscribers were urged to take part in protests. “What Is to Be Done!” was created in February 2021; the first recordings appeared in May. A month later, 32 people had subscribed. The channel’s creators defined themselves as “concerned citizens who want to live in a prosperous and free Russia.” In August 2021, “What Is to Be Done!” announced a nationwide protest action “without criminal components, but bold in its essence” in 77 “strategically important” cities. The channel created at least 16 regional chat rooms for coordination. On September 5, 2021, each participant went out into the street in his or her city and lit a flare, after which 15 videos from different cities were published on “What Is to Be Done!” Sentences have yet to be handed down.

Hello, Grigory Shalvovich. I hope you are doing well. I am filled with different emotions as I write these lines.

Not every day do you write a letter to such a Man. Your lines are already a huge support. Thank you very much.

So then, AUTO-GRAPH.

1. The question of self-definition is difficult to answer, because every reader will see something different and interpret that in their own way. Still, I will try to answer it. I am a lonely Harlequin who makes everyone laugh, who entertains, and helps others at his own expense, but I am alone, sad and helpless, ready for chivalry and exploits.

2. I believe in good and evil, or rather, that for every villain there is a hero.

3. I always rely on my gut feeling and convictions to make decisions.

4. The most important thing [in life] is the ability to find something good and useful in everything, in any situation not to lose heart and not to give up.

5. In places of isolation, the extensive list of pleasures is dramatically reduced. For example, now my happiness is receiving letters from family, from volunteers, a parcel or delivery, good news (not on TV), quality literature.

6. On the other hand, I'm now saddened by much more. I won't say what saddened me on the outside, but in prison I'm most saddened by the license and impunity, by the injustice to the arrested, by the fabricated cases. The list is long.

7. Evil is multifaceted; it's difficult to say something specific. Avarice, greed, bureaucracy, and toadyism have a pernicious effect on ordinary people. Evil is faceless, but everyone knows its face.

8. Dedication, honesty, the simplest of human qualities and virtues can be of benefit.

9. Books. With a good imagination you can see and feel the persons, actions, and events described by the author.

10. Unfortunately, I do not have such a quote.

11. This will probably sound strange, but *The Captain's Daughter* [Pushkin].

12. There is one person, my friend Anton—he is a point of reference for me as the purest and most honest of men.

13. Now it's just a GULAG.

With best regards to you,

Alexei Kurlov

Yegor Denisovich KUSONETS (b. 2004)



Lived in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk. In January 2023, it became known that Yegor Kusunets, Konstantin Zeltsev (p. 143), Matvei Kirillov, Kirill Shekhter and Vladislav Turtugeshev had been detained. The oldest of them was 20 at the time, the youngest was 17. According to media reports, between December 26, 2022, and January 4, 2023, they had tried to set fire to relay cabinets near the

Bugach station so as to disrupt train schedules; they had also thrown a burning gasoline bottle through the open window of an electric locomotive. They were initially charged under Article 167 of the Russian Criminal Code (“willful destruction or damage of property,” punishable by up to five years in prison), but later their case was reclassified as “railway sabotage” (Article 281, punishable by 12 to 20 years in prison).

Hello, Grigory! I am very glad to meet you. Thank you very much for not leaving people like us without attention. After all, we must stick together: then peace will come and goodness will prevail.

To be honest, I myself admire my fearlessness, but everything happens for the best! I have lived with these words all my 19 years.

The attitude towards us, i.e. political prisoners, cannot be changed. The authorities have indoctrinated society to believe that we are bad, that we are enemies of the people, etc. And today's society listens only to the authorities and thinks that this is the right thing to do. People have no personal opinion. But this is their choice, and I have no right to condemn them. One could, of course, change the attitude towards us, but with our society it will be very difficult. God willing, everything will be fine in the end.

AUTO-GRAPH. Answers.

1. A human being, first and foremost.
2. In God and fate.
3. On my gut feeling.
4. Happiness in me and the people around me, and for the world to be a kinder place.
5. When my family and friends are doing well.
6. When things aren't going well for my family and friends.
7. War and money.
8. Justice and kindness.
9. —

10. “The world was created for good people, the bad ones will all disappear!” Zainuddin ibn Abdusaid.

11. That book has yet to fall into my hands.

12. —

13. If I answer this question here, I’ll have a hard time. So to me today, Russia is a country. I’ll let you figure out the rest.

Waiting for an answer.

Maxim Anatolievich LAVRENTIEV (b. 1981)



Lived in the Siberian city of Kemerovo. Combat veteran (served in Chechnya), blogger, activist and co-founder of the “Don’t Be Inert” movement. Lavrentiev worked with the online publication Rosderzhava (see p. 164). He exposed violations of the law and abuses by the authorities. On June 5, 2020, Lavrentiev and fellow activist Sergei Kamensky were filming illegally parked cars

outside the Kemerovo FSB headquarters. They approached one car and demanded that the driver re-park. The car drove off, but a man in civilian dress burst out of the FSB building, attacked Kamensky and grabbed the camera. Lavrentiev went after him with pepper spray. Lavrentiev and Kamensky were arrested on June 26, 2020, under Article 213 of the Russian Criminal Code (“hooliganism by a group of persons acting in collusion and using objects as weapons”); Article 115 (“intentional infliction of light injury”); and Article 318 (“use of violence that endangers the life or health of an official discharging his duties”). In February 2021, because of their publications, Maxim Lavrentiev and Sergei Kamensky were additionally charged under Article 282 (“incitement to hatred or enmity against law enforcement officers”). Since March 2023, according to OVD-Info, Lavrentiev has been kept in solitary confinement.

Hello, Grigory!!! I received a letter from you. Thank you for your lines of encouragement. The gloom will

definitely dissipate soon. I have no doubt. Here are my answers to your questions.

1. I'm an ordinary citizen of my country and I care about what happens in it.

2. I believe in love, in happiness, in justice, in people.

3. On reason.

4. Family and Russia.

5. My family and concerned people who are not silent when they see what's happening in Russia.

6. People's inertia and the lawlessness that is going on at the moment.

7. Envy, greed and indifference.

8. Concern and understanding.

9. Music.

10. The saying "measure twice, and cut once."

11. [Orwell's] *1984*.

12. Mikheil Saakashvili.

13. No comment. I'm sure you'll understand why.

With best regards,

Maxim

Maxim Kirillovich LYPKAN (b. 2005)



Muscovite who lived most recently in the Moscow suburb of Odintsovo. Civil and anti-war activist. Maxim Lypkan graduated from high school in 2022 and planned to enter law school. He has been charged under Article 207.3 of the Russian Criminal Code (“public dissemination under the guise of reliable statements of information known to be false and containing data on the actions of the Russian

Armed Forces outside the territory of Russia for purposes of protecting the interests of the Russian Federation and its citizens, maintaining international peace and security—for reasons of political, ideological, racial, national or religious hatred or enmity, or by reason of hatred or enmity towards some social group,” punishable by up to 10 years in prison). Lypkan has been in custody since February 21, 2023, in part because of the “complicated geopolitical situation in Russia”; his lawyers’ arguments about the state of his health were not taken into account.

The reason for the initiation of criminal proceedings against Lypkan was an interview he gave to Radio Liberty (published online on February 18, 2023), in which he explained his position: “I learned about the war on February 24, 2022, at 5 a.m. I was awake,

I saw the news about the war, and thought: what a war criminal Putin is, since he started this invasion. I was deeply affected by the subject of the war in Ukraine. I consider the war a despicable act towards Ukraine on the part of Russia. I was so shocked by the Ukrainian victims in Kharkiv, Bucha and other Ukrainian cities that I decided to protest actively. This is now my civil position. In February [2022], I went to the first action on Manezhnaya Square with a sign ‘No to War’... I understand all the risks, but I am not afraid to be the organizer of an anti-war action. It is my duty to go to Lubyanka Square and say my word. My confidence in my position and in the fact that Putin is not forever helps me. I have no doubt that his authoritarian regime will soon collapse and that the war will end in defeat for Putin.”

Earlier, Maxim Lypkan had announced a protest rally called “A Year of Hell” to be held on February 24, 2023, on Lubyanka Square. The Moscow authorities refused him permission, citing the epidemiological situation. Lypkan challenged their refusal in court, but his claim was dismissed. The day after he published the refusal handed down by the mayor’s office, he was detained at the Lenin-gradsky Railway Station in Moscow. Because he had publicized an unauthorized rally on social media, he was initially charged with administrative offenses: “public actions intended to discredit the use of the Russian Armed Forces for purposes of defending the interests of the Russian Federation” (Article 20.3.3 of the Russian Code of Administrative Offenses) and “organizing or holding a public event without filing, in accordance with established procedure, a notification on the holding of said public event.” (Article 20.2)

On February 19, 2024, the Odintsovo City Court decided to release Lypkan from criminal liability and ordered compulsory treatment in a specialized psychiatric hospital.

Hello, dear Grigory Shalvovich! Thank you very much for your support. I would like to read your books. Unfortunately, I'm not familiar with your work. I will be glad to answer your interview. I agree with your position that prisoners of conscience and repressions should be covered as much as possible.

1. At the moment, I would define myself as a person of liberal views and an opponent of the adventures of the current government. My name is Maxim Lypkan and I'm in Butyrsky Prison for my words, for criticizing Putin's policies, and protesting against his international crimes, the war, and crimes against human rights inside Russia. I plan to go to university and study chemistry.

2. I believe in science, goodness, mercy and Love.

3. On reason, but sometimes I'm guided by my gut feeling; if I sense injustice and evil, murder, no matter what I will act against it.

4. Peace the world over, justice, Love.

5. Support and solidarity, empathy.
6. Indifference, lies, cynicism.
7. Wars and repression.
8. Knowledge, peace, mutual aid.
9. Music.
10. I don't yet have a favorite quote. But I believe that the Russian language is a great force.
11. Right now, it's Oscar Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*.
12. I don't have a role model right now. But I like the resilience and fearlessness of Alexei Anatolievich N.
13. A huge, potentially free country with a great future.

With best regards,

Maxim Lypkan

Evgenia Igorevna MAKARENKO (b. 1996)



Lived in Novosibirsk before moving to Moscow, where she represented a Novosibirsk company. She practiced powerlifting in her spare time, also yoga and Thai boxing. Formerly an assistant to Yabloko party member Alexei Krapukhin, Evgenia Makarenko was convicted under Articles 229.1 and 228 of the Russian Criminal Code (“smuggling” and “illegal acquisition of drugs on a large

scale”) in January 2023. All because a 75-year-old friend in the United States, Frank Raucci, had wanted to surprise her. As a Christmas present, he sent Makarenko jeans as well as a few grams of marijuana and some painkillers (the kind he took) containing morphine and amphetamine. All legal in the US. When the package arrived in Russia, it was replaced by a fake. On December 23, 2021, Makarenko was detained upon receipt of the box.

Evgenia Makarenko has been sentenced to 11 years in a general-regime penal colony.

1. I define myself as a human being. An individual.
2. I believe in the universe, and in myself.
3. I am guided by intuition and logic. By moral aspects and norms.
4. The most important thing? To live honestly, in good conscience, for the benefit of people and animals. To

remain true to yourself, to ideas, and to bring up a worthy continuation of yourself.

5. I take find in nature, in achieving my goals. In my home and its occupants.

6. I am saddened by: injustice, lies, cruelty, greed, stupidity, insolence... In general, by human vices and the destruction of the planet.

7. Selfishness, greed, stupidity. I repeat: human vices and an unwillingness to fight them. Childish behavior.

8. Of benefit to mankind are: caring for the planet, fighting discrimination, self-knowledge, self-improvement, self-sacrifice, and education.

9. I am motivated by literature and painting. (I'm an artist and write poetry).

10. I'd have to quote all of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and the movie "Dead Man" (b/w).

11. I can't single out one book. There are works by Nietzsche, Diogenes, and Homer. Also by Stephen King and Erich Maria Remarque.

12. No. I have no desire to be a copy. "My main rival is Me."

13. Russia is the country where I was born. It is beautiful nature, which is being destroyed and sold off; beautiful rivers, lakes and streams, which are being polluted. It is a country where talented, extraordinary, unusual, unconventional people who stand out and want freedom of expression are imprisoned for something they did not do. It's a place of fear, pain and a fluttering "rose-colored dream." It's a huge number of drug addicts, alcoholics, lonely people, and people who "live" at work in order to live. It's a place that people criticize, while forgetting that they should start with themselves. Be the Desmond Doss of their time. It's a place about which there are many songs, tales, and stories. A place where everyone feels that ineffable Russian longing. It's an infinite land and a childish Generation Next.

Marina Borisovna MELIKHOVA (b. 1971)



Lived in the southern city of Krasnodar. Former lawyer. Activist. Supporter of the Citizens of the USSR movement. Melikhova explained to her readers on social media their constitutional rights (e.g. freedom of peaceful assembly) and quoted Lenin, as she is a committed socialist. Her words, however, were deemed “extremist” and she spent 26 months in prison under Article 280 of the Russian

Criminal Code (“calls for extremism”). Released in July 2022, she explained, “Russia is the legal successor of the USSR. Yet for some reason, [the security forces] believe that even mentioning the USSR is extremism and a threat to the existing regime. But I was born in the USSR, it’s my country, my homeland, I’m proud of that, and no one has the right to condemn me for it.” She also described the conditions of her incarceration: “I sat alone, in a damp cold cell. I was not given any belongings. No relatives or even a lawyer were allowed in. So as not to go mad, I wrote and read.”

On June 21, 2023, Melikhova was detained under Article 280.3 of the Criminal Code (“public acts aimed at discrediting the Russian Armed Forces, committed by a person already held administratively liable for similar acts within the year”). Melikhova attributes this new criminal case to her pacifist position and human rights activism. She published anti-war videos on her YouTube channel (70,000 subscribers).

In 2022, Marina Melikhova was charged at least three times with the administrative offense of discrediting the Russian Army (Article

20.3.3 of the Administrative Code) and twice she was fined 30,000 rubles.

Dear Grigory! I have been a fan of your work since my youth and I am very glad to answer your questions.

1. An immortal divine Soul in a human body, made in the image of the Creator!

2. I believe that God has no hands, eyes, ears, or words other than human ones. I believe in the triumph of love, goodness and a just society.

3. On my gut feeling, intuition, flow.

4. To respect the laws of the universe. To make this world a better place. Evolution.

5. Association and friendship with like-minded persons; moving towards the great goal of building a new, just, creative and safe society.

6. Lying; manipulation; the violation of a person's free will.

7. The Russian government.

8. Creative labor; a strong harmonious family; discovering your talents.

9. Russian literature.

10. No one is your friend, no one is your enemy, while every person is your Teacher.

11. *Two Lives* by Concordia Antarova.

12. Mahatma Gandhi. Lev Tolstoy. Alexander Pushkin

13. My homeland is the Soviet Union. I'm happy that I had a Soviet upbringing and education. The Russian Federation is alien to me with its bestial capitalism, and totalitarian capitalism, and totalitarian regime. It is the depths; it is lies upon lies; it is aggression and violence. I believe in the rebirth of Russia and the coming of a Golden Age.

Vasily Yurievich MELNIKOV (b. 1983)



Lived in Kotelniki, in the Volgograd Region. A blogger, Melnikov was sentenced to 320 hours of compulsory labor in 2017 under Article 280.1 of the Russian Criminal Code (“public calls to action aimed at violating Russia’s territorial integrity”): Melnikov had proposed creating an Autonomous Republic of Kotelniki with its own banking system, currency, and a “normal people’s power.” On July

27, 2023, he was detained on charges of “spreading falsehoods about the Russian Army” (Article 207.3). This article was created after the start of Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine as a tool to suppress dissent: it prohibits any criticism of the war or of the Russian authorities.

On January 16, 2024, Vasily Melnikov was sentenced to five years in a general-regime penal colony.

Good afternoon, I am open to discussion, especially on relevant contemporary topics.

1. I am a human being of planet Earth, a Russian, a Russian-speaker.
2. I believe in verifiable facts.
3. Reason is superior to the senses.

4. It is important to be able to disseminate any information without invented restrictions.
5. “When you are understood.”
6. People’s refusal to accept reality, while replacing it with myths.
7. The hushing up of facts; blatant lies; the refusal to enter into dialogue.
8. Mutual cooperation; exchange of information.
9. The music of Yegor Letov, at the moment: his song “Everything is going according to plan.”
10. “Obscurantism and obfuscation reign in [Russian] society”. Alexander Nevzorov (an approximate quote from his blog).
11. I just read Agatha Christie’s *Murder on the Orient Express*. A premeditated crime is solved, despite false evidence and collusion, by analyzing the facts.
12. There are anti-heroes whom I would not want to be: Puchkov (a.k.a Goblin), Anatoly Shariy, Vladimir Solovyov, Maria Zakharova, Vasily Nebenzya, Yuri Podolyaka, Konstantin Ernst, Stas Vasilyev, Stalin, last year’s Yevgeny Petrosyan, Oleg Gazmanov, etc.

13. Today [Russia] is the Nutcracker, who's bewitched and can't do anything about the Rat, but the ballet must be performed for the whole kingdom.

Vladlen Alexeyevich MENSHIKOV (b. 1993)



Lived in the Sverdlovsk Region. On September 27, 2022, Vladlen Menshikov was detained at a St. Petersburg airport on charges of “attempted sabotage” (Article 281 of the Russian Criminal Code): he had allegedly stretched a twist of aluminum wire between two rails at the 80th kilometer of the Rezh-Striganovo section along which ran trains carrying Russian military equipment. In a videotaped “confession,” edited from several clips

and released by the FSB, Menshikov said that he had “a negative attitude” toward the war in Ukraine, and then claimed to have had thoughts about “seizing power by military means,” “overthrowing the government” and “eliminating the president.”

Menshikov was additionally charged under Article 205.2 (“publicly justifying terrorism”) and Article 275.1 (“collusion with a foreign organization”): he had allegedly created an email on the secure Protonmail service, contacted the Freedom of Russia Legion (a Ukraine-based paramilitary unit), and “agreed to participate” in the activities of this organization.

Through his lawyer, Menshikov told Mediazona that he said “the words I had to” on camera under duress, that he does not admit his guilt and has no connection to the email account that allegedly wrote to the Freedom of Russia Legion.

Menshikov is being held in solitary confinement. If convicted, he faces more than 15 years in prison.

Vladlen Menshikov has been added to the list of terrorists and extremists kept by Rosfinmonitoring (Federal Financial Monitoring Service). Now all his accounts will be blocked and he will not be able to open new ones even if released from pre-trial detention. A person cannot be removed from this list unless the case is closed or the criminal record expunged.

Hello Grigory Shalvovich, thank you ever so much for your support. I will try to answer your questions.

1. I would define myself as someone who wants to prove himself innocent of the charges against him. To prove the discrepancy in the articles and the lack of [evidence]. I hope that my position will be seen and heard at the decisive moment. During my time in pre-trial detention—it has already been a year—I have tried to find something useful for myself. That is, reading books, drawing, physical exercise, and thinking about how to improve my life and that of my family, how to do good for others. In other words, everything that I did not have enough time for when I was free, that I did not appreciate, did not notice, while being distracted by useless things. I hope that soon all the innocent people will be released and everything will be much better.

2. I believe in God, in Jesus Christ, as an example of supreme power, salvation, and mercy, by which I mean

Christianity without the various offshoots, but with respect for all faiths. I believe that the light side will win. It can't be otherwise, it's only a matter of time.

3. I have realized that mostly I should rely on my gut feeling, but on reason when dealing with everyday and technical matters.

4. To me, the most important things are health, love, good spirits, peace of mind, the support of family and loved ones, common sense and justice.

5. I'm heartened by the hope that things will get better, an optimistic attitude, and any good news.

6. I'm saddened by indifference, aggression, and taunts.

7. The greatest evil comes from anger, revenge, hypocrisy and lies.

8. The greatest benefit is brought by things that are machine-made. From them comes everything that makes man's life easier.

9. Music, literature, movies, fine arts.

10. The habit of doing everything without thinking, without believing in truth and goodness, but only on command, makes a person indifferent to good and evil and able to commit crimes without remorse, while finding for

those same crimes various justifications.

11. The Bible. When I found myself in pre-trial detention, I came to love reading. I read a lot of books, interesting ones. The list over this last year has only grown. When I was free, my brain and eyes were mostly strained by the Internet. Books are easier on the eyes.

12. I can't name such a person, and even if I could, everyone has their plusses and minuses.

13. Russia is my homeland, the place where I was born and grew up, a place of great expanses and opportunities. To build new cities and improve public spaces. Meanwhile, an adequate minimum wage, a fair distribution of resources, the right values, peace, friendship, love and humor will save us from everything negative.

Let's hope and believe in better things to come.

Alexei Anatolievich NAVALNY (1976-2024)



Lawyer. Creator of the Anti-Corruption Foundation. Political opposition leader. Ran for Moscow mayor in 2013; barred from running for Russian president in 2018. Evacuated to Berlin in August 2020 after being poisoned with a nerve agent. Arrested on his return to Moscow on January 17, 2021. Transferred in December 2023 from the IK-6 penal colony in the Vladimir Region (160 miles from Moscow) to a special-regime colony (“Polar Wolf”) north of the Arctic Circle. Assassinated on February 16, 2024

1. From the prison authorities, I constantly hear this disgruntled phrase: “Hmm. You seem to be in a good mood today...” So I guess it’s like this: I am a political prisoner who very much misses his family, work and colleagues, but who keeps in good spirits. I am also, of course, a reader. I spend most of my day with a book in my hands.

2. In God and science. I believe that we live in a non-deterministic universe and have free will. I believe that we are not alone in this universe. I believe that our deeds and

actions will be evaluated. I believe in true love. I believe that Russia will be happy and free. And I don't believe in death.

3. There's no contradiction here; it's a false alternative. Evolution has designed us so that we don't have to think long and hard when we see a snake in our bed. Nor will we make instant decisions about how to build a house that snakes can't slither into.

There's a marvelous book about this called *Thinking, Fast and Slow* by Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman. I highly recommend it.

4. To be useful to society and remain a good person.

5. Simple family moments. Like going somewhere together in the car. One of us starts goofing around and singing, and the rest join in. And we can't stop until we've sung a bunch of songs. And the love and happiness overflow.

6. The unwillingness of many people to think; their incomprehension of basic cause-and-effect relationships. Every time someone says to me something like: "Corruption doesn't affect my life" or "The people in power have done all their stealing, but if new people come to power, the stealing will start all over again," I think: How is it that hundreds of millions of years of evolution have

given this person the most amazing brain—and they don't use it?

7. All it takes for evil to triumph is the inaction of good people. A phrase attributed to many, though no one knows exactly who said it (I checked). It is amazingly accurate. The hypocrisy of neutrality, “apoliticism”, and refusal, concealing laziness, cowardice and meanness, is the main reason why a bunch of well-organized villains have ruled over millions throughout human history.

8. Engaging in the battle of good vs. neutral.

9. I love literature and consider that I know something about it. I like movies, music and architecture, but I don't know much about them. As for the rest of the arts, I will diplomatically say, “I treat them with respect.”

Literature has the strongest effect of any art form. After all, it works through your own imagination. What could be stronger than that?

10. I don't just have a favorite maxim. I have a favorite maxim that contains the word “maxim”: “Act in such

a way that the maxim of your action may become a rule of universal behavior.”

This is one of Kant’s formulations of the moral law.

It’s very similar to the famous “golden rule” in the Bible (“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”). The biblical version is more merciful; the Kantian version is, I think, more responsible, and I choose it.

Following any of these rules is very difficult, but it’s something one should strive for.

11. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. When I read it—I was about 10 or 11—I realized that books could be not only boring and useful, but also impossible to put down and could make you laugh on every page. So I started reading. I always feel very sorry for people who don’t read books. They probably never had the luck in childhood of having the right book fall into their hands.

12. There were and are so many good people—brave, great, kind, and intelligent—that to choose just one person would be to rob yourself.

13. A place where I understand everyone and feel at home. A country where they speak my language and my people live.

I'm able to separate the country from the government, so in these dramatic times I love Russia no less than I always have.

Igor Gennadievich NAGIBIN (b. 1959)



Lived in Sochi. Pensioner. In September 2021, Igor Nagibin was arrested and became one of 11 defendants in the case against the “What Is to Be Done!” Telegram channel. The prosecution claims that they created a network of Telegram channels aimed at organizing mass riots in Russia during the State Duma elections (September 17-19, 2021).

All the defendants in this case have been charged under Article 212 of the Russian Criminal Code (“instigation of mass riots”) and Article 282 (“incitement to hatred by an organized group”). The other 10 defendants are: Vyacheslav Abramov (p. 95), Dmitry Chebanov, Zhanna Chernova, Nikita Kreshchuk, Alexei Kurlov (p. 225), Igor Kuznetsov, Dmitry Lamanov, Maria Platonova, Ildar Sadriyev (p.297) and Alexei Yanochkin (p. 388).

Nagibin has been additionally charged with “illegal possession of explosives” (Article 222.1): in September 2021, during a search of his home, gunpowder was found. Nagibin said that he did not know to whom the substance belonged. In the process of arresting Nagibin, though he did not resist, law enforcers sprayed him with tear gas. As a result, he temporarily lost his vision and suffered a burned throat: his voice has never recovered.

Hello to you, Grigory! I understand that you are the author of *The State Counsellor* and the subsequent adventures of Erast Fandorin, and therefore I want to thank you for your Labor, which quite literally presents pictures in words very beautifully! What seems important (sometimes only seems so), and the way everything looks can only be seen by the sighted, and then only with an imagination and the ability to evaluate the seen, since one can only draw a picture for the blind with words, and you are a Master, without any exaggeration! Your desire to enlighten and to explain deserves Respect, and I think you will be better at it than many who try to do this. I will try to answer your questions.

1. I am an ordinary person, born in the USSR, in Kazakhstan. In 1993 I was forced to leave Kazakhstan for the Russian Federation at the age of 33. Like all Russians, I feel badly when there is injustice somewhere. I consider it my duty to restore justice, relying on my Reason and Conscience, and using my Consciousness.

[4.] The main thing in life is our Experience, which we must pass on to the younger generation.

[5.] Joy is that light feeling when something works out and brings satisfaction not only to you, but also to Humanity as a whole, and thus to Nature.

[6. 7.] I am saddened by people's stupidity and indifference, by Malice, Envy, and Cruelty toward Man and Nature in general. These qualities cultivate Evil, although everything is relative. Evil has its own adherents.

[8.] Benefit... [is brought by] Goodness and Love in all its manifestations, both physical and in Spirit.

[9.] I marvel at the Art of Nature: mountains, forests, rivers, lakes, fjords, waterfalls, everything Living and natural—I dissolve in them. Good music.

[10.] I don't remember other people's sayings, BUT "judge the flock by its priest!"—that works.

[11.] As a teenager I read [Raymond Moody's] *Life After Life*. I understood a lot; there's a whole range of other things, mostly realities and practices.

[12.] A human likeness does not exist. Every one of us is an individual with their own World and Worldview.

13. I returned to Russia after 13 years in Germany. I built a house, took care of my 90-year-old mother. I was

robbed during a search, was made an invalid. I'm in prison under Articles 212 and 282. Answer [this] yourself.

Glad to be in touch!

Roman Raifovich NASRYEV (b. 1995)



Lived in the town of Bakal, in the Chelyabinsk Region. Musician; member of the rock band Room 32; former driver for the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) with the rank of senior police sergeant. Married; two young children. In the early hours of October 11, 2022, Roman Nasryev and his bandmate Alexei Nuriyev (p. 261) threw Molotov cocktails through the window of a Bakal administra-

tive building where there was a military enlistment office. They did this to protest against Russia's war in Ukraine and the "partial" mobilization. Nasryev was arrested that day and later convicted under Article 205.2 of the Russian Criminal Code ("terrorist act committed by a group of persons working in collusion") and Article 205.3 ("training for the purpose of engaging in terrorist activities").

On April 10, 2023, Nasryev was sentenced to 19 years: four years in prison and then 15 years in a strict-regime penal colony.

Hello, Grigory! Thank you for your warm words of support and understanding. I'll be happy to answer your questions.

1. My answer is probably banal. I consider myself a human being, a citizen of our planet. I like being part of this world.

2. At this point, I believe most of all in love and common sense.

3. I rely on both my reason and my gut feeling.

4. The most important thing is the well-being of our planet and human beings and the interaction of these parts in perfect harmony.

5. Even though I'm far away from home and family, it's my daughter's voice that brings me the most joy.

6. What saddens me the most is people's selfishness. It's as if people didn't care about each other anymore. You can't behave like that...

7. War. We've already been through it, yet man falls into this trap again and again.

8. Love and understanding.

9. Music and poetry.

10. "Ask the dead the price of words, they'll give you the answer..." the band E.S.T.

11. Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf*.

12. Yesenin has a long poem called "The Land of [Scoundrels]". There's a character in it called Nomakh. He's my role model, but in a slightly different way.

13. Whatever Russia is, to me it's the Motherland.

That seems to be all, citizen B. Akunin. Write to me. Not saying goodbye...

Alexei Talgatovich NURIYEV (b. 1985)



Lived in the town of Bakal, in the Chelyabinsk Region. Musician; member of the rock band Room 32; he served in the fire-and-rescue department of the Emergency Situations Ministry. Father of a small daughter and a draft-age stepson. In the early hours of October 11, 2022, Alexei Nuriyev and his bandmate Roman Nasryev (p. 259) threw two Molotov cocktails through the window of a Bak-

al building where there was a military enlistment office. They did this to protest against the war in Ukraine and Russia’s “partial” mobilization. (The fire was put out by security guard Valentina Mishakova.) Nuriyev was arrested that day and later convicted under Article 205.2 of the Russian Criminal Code (“terrorist act committed by a group of persons working in collusion”) and Article 205.3 (“training for the purpose of engaging in terrorist activity”).

On April 10, 2023, he was sentenced to 19 years: four years in prison and then 15 years in a strict-regime penal colony.

1. I would probably define myself as a person who cares about the fate of Russia and its future. An active member of a sane society.

2. I am a Muslim by religion and I believe, of course, first of all, in the One God, and in the creation of man, endowed by Him with reason. I also believe in a bright future, freedom, peace, justice and that after the darkest night there will be a long-awaited dawn.

3. Of course, I try to rely on my reason, but as a creative person I'm often overwhelmed by my gut feeling, which sometimes obscures reason.

4. My faith, my parents, my family. There was also Freedom—of creativity, of speech, and of many other aspects of life—and Freedom as such. As Hegel said, “Freedom is a conscious necessity.”

5. Life itself (family, children, creativity, sports), a full life in harmony and tranquility, a life that is evolving and developing spiritually.

6. What saddens me most of all is injustice. Why is the crown of creation—man—so helpless and pitiful in the face of the disasters and horrors that have befallen him? Also saddening is when people disguise their dark deeds with the loftiest words. Also our reality, a terrible reality with its crimes, inhumanity, hypocrisy, mendacity and equivocation.

7. The exorbitant ambitions of people (rulers). The insatiable desire for material goods. Hypocrisy.

8. The development in oneself of spirituality and useful knowledge. The development of creativity, art, science. Knowledge that teaches a person to be a Human Being.

9. Different art forms have some effect on me, but strongest of all are, of course, music and poetry and good literature.

10. “Dishonest art stinks.” “Do not cause suffering to others and do not participate in evil.” [Both from *KGBT+* by Viktor Pelevin.]

11. The Koran; books of the Holy Scripture. As for fiction, there are many books. I love to read. Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Arch of Triumph*; Solzhenitsyn’s *The Gulag Archipelago*, *The First Circle*, and *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*—those are among the latest books I’ve read in prison. I especially like Kafka, Joyce, Beckett, Proust, Faulkner, Dostoevsky, Kuprin, Chekhov—almost all the Russian classics. Silver Age and leaden age poetry. Of the modern poets, I like Boris Ryzhy. I could go on and on about books—endlessly.

12. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and, of course, my parents, who always support me, no matter what happens.

13. Russia is my Motherland, a Motherland that today is ill, but which, I believe, will be cured, will recover, get back on her feet and flourish.

Sergei Ivanovich OZEROV (b. 1972)



Lived in the city of Arzamas, in the Nizhny Novgorod Region. Laborer. A defendant in the Artpodgotovka case (see also Korniy, p. 170). In mid-October 2017, Ozerov traveled to Moscow to take part in “Revolution 5.11.17”, a protest to be led by opposition politician V.V. Maltsev. (On November 5, 2017, supporters would congregate on central city squares and speak out—until Putin resigned.) Sergei

Ozerov rented an apartment with Oleg Dmitriev and Oleg Ivanov. Days before the protest, their apartment was searched: bottles of gasoline and solvent were found on the balcony. All three men were convicted under Article 205.2 of the Russian Criminal Code (“preparing to commit a terrorist act by a group of persons working in collusion”). All three men claim they are completely innocent and were the victims of a provocation by the FSB.

In custody since November 2, 2017, Sergei Ozerov was sentenced to eight years in a strict-regime penal colony.

The other day I read your book *Nechekhovskaya Intelligentsia*, and some of the stories in that book I reread. Certain phrases of yours were underlined in pencil—which is rare. I encountered this in [Solzhenitsyn’s] book *The Gulag Archipelago*. Then today I received a letter from you. At first glance, your questions are simple, but in order to answer them, you need to seriously reflect.

1. Who am I? I'm an ordinary person from an ordinary working-class family. I've had many different trials in my life. There are some for which I berate myself for having acted as I did, and some for which I'm proud of having made the right choice and my conscience doesn't gnaw at me. During my time in prison, I've received a huge number of letters from different corners of the world. In these letters, people see me as an example and are proud of my actions. Which flatters me. But I'm still just an ordinary person, with my own nuttinesses.

2. What do I believe in? What is my faith? If it's spiritual, then I'm an Orthodox Christian, and that says it all. Otherwise, I have faith that these hard times will come to an end, that priorities will be reconsidered, that we will follow a different path of development, because humanity strives for freedom, for life, not for death, which is natural. But this path will be traveled in different ways. One person will lose only a little, another person will lose a lot. The other day I was discussing your book and a fellow prisoner called you a feminist (though you call yourself that too), but it was said in reproach: when heroic deeds are done by women, you single them out and tell us their names; whereas when

men have done the same thing, you don't mention them by name, which is unfair. To which I replied: if we consider ourselves the stronger sex, then in our actions there is not heroism, it's what's expected of us. Whereas the weaker sex did what was not expected of them, and more than they are capable of. And so they set an example. In my personal experience, there have been cases when women acted more toughly than men and had more strength of spirit. In this respect, I'm on your side.

3. It's difficult to say unequivocally what I rely on, reason or gut feeling. When making important decisions, I try to analyze, calculate different options, but the most important thing is that my actions not go against my conscience, especially recently. I made a decision that made my life worse, but my conscience is clear.

4. The most important thing in life—and I have come to really appreciate it—is freedom. They say that a person is given at birth something that no one has the right to infringe on—that is freedom, and that is life. So then, I've had moments in my life when that freedom was more precious to me than life.

5. I never would have thought that utterly insignificant things could bring so much joy. When I was in Butyrka [Prison] I didn't see the sky or sun for over a year (our window faced a solid fence). Then they took me to court: when I got out of the van, I saw trees, leaves, sky—and my legs gave way. It is a great joy to hear the voices of family and friends. I haven't heard them in a long time. Any ordinary thing that we never noticed before can bring so many joyful feelings.

6. It saddens me to see the indifference, the betrayal, what people will do for a quick profit. But sadder still is what they will do to cover up their crimes: they will lie, sling mud, humiliate and abuse, and all for the sake of their power, that power is their life.

7. Evil begets evil. Violence brings more violence, and if it's also done with impunity and legalized [it's even worse]: in that case, they say that a "good" person can use this violence against a "bad" person, which is welcomed. Meanwhile, the "good" person will be promoted. This is the source of a lot of evil.

8. Taking into account the opinions of others; trying to live according to one's conscience and to think not only

of oneself; not interfering with progress; and not trying to change the laws of nature.

9. The kind of art that evokes feelings and touches the very depths of one's soul. Although I don't understand much about art. Still, literature, music, and cinema—they all stir up different feelings and emotions in me.

10. “What happiness to say what you think, and what a torture to have to think what you're saying.” [Sergei Dovlatov] “We had a destiny, not a life, a destiny, and we didn't give up.” [Grigorij Ryskin, quoted by Dovlatov]

11. The most important book that has evoked the deepest feelings—no other art can do that—is [Dostoevsky's] *The Brothers Karamazov*.

12. As an example to myself and others, I cite Andrei Sakharov. A man who had many privileges and was favored by the powers that be, he gave up everything for the sake of justice and protecting those in need. [Human rights activist Andrei] Babushkin, even after his mother was murdered, did not abandon his idea of helping. There's one other person, one born with a silver spoon in his mouth: as a boy he might have become an imperial page, an important post that would have opened many doors for him, but he refused that post on his own initiative. Instead he went into science and there too achieved

much success and the recognition of the world scientific community, then gave everything up for the sake of his [anarchist] ideas, went to prison, then went on fighting for his ideas. This is Prince Kropotkin [1842-1921], as you may have guessed. Among my contemporaries, I would single out [Nobel Peace Prize laureate] Dmitry Muratov. I won't describe everything he has done since everyone already knows.

13. Russia is my motherland, which today is going through a very difficult time, which will have to face many trials in the future, which will have to reconsider many things and make the right choice. How much suffering Russia has had to bear, and how many times we have stood at a crossroads. We ourselves are largely to blame: for our indifference, our passivity, our failure to learn from past mistakes, and our unwillingness to learn at all. Our pride and belief in our greatness prevent us from thinking. It seems to us that we are always right, while everyone else refuses to recognize this. I really want to believe that everything will change and that we will move in the right direction, because we still have the potential to do so.

There you have it, all my answers. If there's anything else you're interested in, please ask. I'll be happy to answer.

Pavel Antonovich OLEYNIKOV (b. 2000)



Lives in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk. Oleynikov was arrested on March 9, 2023, in Novosibirsk on charges of attempted destruction of property by arson (Article 167 of the Russian Criminal Code). According to the media outlet SHOT, Oleynikov broke a window in the Active City resource center and threw a burning rag inside. The center collects humanitarian aid for Russian soldiers and weaves

camouflage nets. There were no casualties. The alarm system went off, security guards arrived and soon extinguished the fire.

On October 23, 2023, Pavel Oleynikov was sentenced to two years and three months of compulsory labor and released on his own recognizance.

Grigory, greetings! I can't remember where I heard or saw your name, but it seems very familiar to me (Boris Akunin). I am sitting and thinking about AUTO-GRAPH. I'm not ready to answer some of the questions, so not all of the questions will have answers.

1. —

2. I believe in myself, in my actions, that they will get me where I need to go.

3. On my reason and my gut feeling taken together. Sometimes my reason tells me what to do, and my gut tells me how. And vice versa.

4. The path to happiness, to what you want.

5. The thing that brings me the most joy is sports, a conclusion I've come to in those moments when I've temporarily given them up.

6. It saddens me when my actions reflect adversely on my family and friends.

7. —

8. —

9. Music.

10. And the hundreds of troubles that have befallen us, we will quietly hide behind our smile.

11. I won't say it's the most important book, but it helped me a lot at one point: *Mind Power into the 21st Century* by John Kehoe.

12. Yes, but not just one.

13. There's a reason why this question is No. 13.)))
Russia to me is a prison [smiley: broadly smiling face with eyes tight shut].

Thank you for your letter! The attention is
invaluable...

With kind and best regards,

Pavel

Pyotr Grigorievich OPALNIK (b. 1978)



Lived in the town of Pestovo, in the Novgorod Region. Builder turned house sales manager. An ethnic Ukrainian with dual citizenship: Ukrainian/ Russian. On January 18, 2023, Pyotr Opalnik was detained under Article 275.1 of the Russian Criminal Code (“confidential cooperation with a foreign state”, punishable by up to eight years in prison). The FSB alleges that he worked for Ukrainian intel-

ligence and induced mobilized persons “to commit treason” by providing the enemy with locations of Russian military units, by stealing and transferring Russian military equipment, and by voluntarily surrendering to captivity.

For the first two months of his pre-trial detention, Opalnik was kept in solitary confinement. Still, he hoped that he would be pronounced innocent and released. He read, exercised and wrote optimistic letters to his common-law wife Irina. But when he realized that his detention was not a mistake, he became depressed: “No need to bury me,” he wrote. “Cremate me, and send the ashes to my mother—don’t bury me on Russian soil.” After getting a lawyer and three cellmates, his spirits improved.

On February 28, 2024, Mediazona reported that Opalnik had been additionally charged under Article 352.1 (“attempting to organize voluntary surrender”).

Grigory Shalvovich, hello and God bless you.

1. A positive young old man, resilient and cheerful.
2. The most correct answer to this question is that I believe in God. I pray to Saint Matrona of Moscow every day. I believe in humanity and justice, I believe that I will soon be free, because I didn't steal anything, I didn't kill anyone, no one was hurt, I didn't want to do anything bad, I just wanted to help people, but it turns out that last summer a new law was enacted that made this impossible to do.
3. When making important decisions, I rely on my reason, my gut feeling and the support of family and friends.
4. The most important thing in life is to end the hostility between two brother nations, to bring peace to the whole Earth and to keep everyone alive and healthy.
5. What gives me the most joy in life are the achievements and victories of our children.
6. As for what saddens me the most, I try not to notice it, not to pay attention to it. More important is to rejoice in life.

7. The greatest evil to man and mankind is brought by big money.

8. The greatest benefits come from friendship and humane mutual understanding.

9. I'm not very strong in the arts and their forms, but I guess I'm most affected by the Great Works of Great Musicians.

10. "No good deed, no matter how small, is ever wasted" is a phrase from the Greek poet Aesop.

11. Of the books I've read recently, I can single out a few, but the first is still Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*.

12. A role model... I'll rephrase that, now I want to meet the author of the book *I Want, I Can, I Must*. She is a Major person: Marina Ivanovna Melia.

13. Although I was born and grew up in Ukraine, today, despite everything that's happening, Russia to me is like a second Motherland. Here I have my beloved wife, Irochka. Together we're building a strong family; we've started building a house, and we're raising our children. I believe and know that soon I'll return from here and we will continue everything that we started and haven't yet had time to finish. Everything will be fine!

Alexander Vladimirovich ORSHULEVICH
(b. 1987)



Lived in Kaliningrad. Father of four. Formerly head of the Baltic Vanguard of the Russian Resistance (BARS). On January 30, 2017, the Prosecutor’s Office of the Kaliningrad Region sent an official warning to BARS head Orshulevich about the impermissibility of his “extremist activities”. He was given two months to take practical measures aimed at preventing further violations of the

law on counteracting extremist activities. Orshulevich resigned as head of BARS and left the organization, which was unregistered at the time. BARS then amended its charter.

Nevertheless, on May 27, 2017, Alexander Orshulevich was arrested and charged under Article 282.1 of the Russian Criminal Code (“creation of an extremist community,” punishable by up to 10 years in prison). According to the investigation, as set out in the protocol on the initiation of criminal proceedings, “the purpose of creating an extremist community, as determined by A.V. Orshulevich, was the violent seizure of power in the Kaliningrad Region by means of a series of extremist crimes aimed, among other

things, at the withdrawal of the Kaliningrad Region from the Russian Federation and its independent existence as a member of the European Union.”

In October 2018, Orshulevich was additionally charged under Article 205.2 (“public calls to carry out terrorist activities”) and Article 280 (“public calls to carry out extremist activities”).

On April 17, 2020, Alexander Orshulevich was sentenced to eight years in a general-regime penal colony.

1. I am a fighter for truth and a “knight” of Christianity.
2. I believe in the Holy Trinity, according to the teachings of the Church.
3. On my Christian conscience.
4. To serve God and save my soul forever.
5. Peace of mind and harmony with loved ones.
6. My own unworthiness.
7. Slavery. Enslavement to sin and aversion to goodness.
8. Doing good deeds and living in harmony with God.

9. Music (singing).

10. “Live as if Russia’s salvation depended on you alone,” — the words of a White general to his daughter.

11. From works of fiction, *War and Peace* by Count Lev Tolstoy.

12. Alexander Vasilyevich Suvorov.

13. A union of Russian people, faithful children of the true Orthodox Church, waiting for God’s forgiveness of our sins and the restoration of His kingdom—this is the veritable Russia, which alone will resist the Anti-Russia of the heirs of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

With best regards,

Alexander Orshulevich
Valdai, penal colony-4

Igor Konstantinovich PASKAR (b. 1976)



Born in the Volgograd Region. Worked as a courier, loader, construction worker, etc. Moved to Moscow in 2013. In 2020, Paskar went to the Belarusian Embassy to support opponents of Belarusian dictator Lukashenko. In 2021, he took part in the winter protests in support of Alexei Navalny. In September 2021 he returned to the Volgograd Region. On June 14, 2022, Paskar painted his face blue

and yellow, the colors of the Ukrainian flag, then went and threw a Molotov cocktail at the door of the Krasnodar FSB building. That day Paskar was charged under Article 205 of the Russian Criminal Code (“commission of a terrorist act”); he was also beaten, tortured with electric shocks, and accused of working for the Ukrainian government. “It was a public action,” Paskar wrote from detention. “If I had gone into hiding, it would have lost all meaning. I wanted to express my opinion, it was an outcry. I’m a simple man, a simple worker, like those who live in Ukraine, in the ‘Special Military Operation’ zone. I sacrificed myself to the regime, but I’m not a terrorist. What kind of terrorist am I? That’s ridiculous.”

On May 31, 2023, Igor Paskar was sentenced to 8.5 years in a strict-regime penal colony.

In one of the letters I received I was asked world-view questions by Boris Akunin.

The questions are certainly interesting and require elaborate answers. I will try to give a more or less detailed answer to the first two questions. Or rather my idea of how I understand them: 1. How would you define yourself? Who are you? 2. What do you believe in?

Apart from the seemingly obvious fact that each of us is 1/8 billionth part of the large society of homo sapiens, each of us is what we believe in: Christian, Muslim, German, Russian, Jew, realist, optimist, democrat, autocrat. These two questions are inseparable and complementary. Above all, it's a question of self-identification.

Whether one believes in a national identity and cheers for the national teams of Germany, Russia, or Israel at the Olympic Games, or whether one positions oneself as part of a larger European or global project, depends on the individual. It is by inner conviction, by this conviction alone, and not by some special set of genes, that a person can identify with such large societies as a nation.

The question of faith has undoubtedly been, is, and will remain an important one for me throughout my life. First and foremost because any answer is subject to doubt.

Somewhere I found the definition of a worldview called “spiritual quest”. This is probably the most accurate definition of my faith. The other part of my outlook, a belief in the value of human life, is commonly referred to as humanism. But the [Russian] state, which positions itself as a champion of traditional values, has defined my views as extremist and identified me as a terrorist.

Svetlana Alexandrovna PETRIYCHUK

(b. 1980)



Lived in Moscow. Playwright, screenwriter, film director. Winner of the Golden Mask Award 2022 for her play “Finist, the Brave Falcon” — the true story of Russian women who were recruited online by radical Islamists only to wind up in Russian prisons on their return home from Syria. On May 4, 2023, Petriyчук was detained with Zhenya Berkovich (see p. 106)

and later charged under Article 205.2 of the Russian Criminal Code (“publicly justifying terrorism”) on the basis of her award-winning play. The prosecution’s case hinges on the “destructological” findings of Professor Roman Silantiev: he examined “Finist, the Brave Falcon”. “Destructology,” invented by Silantiev in 2018, looks at “destructive entities” and “challenges that threaten people’s life, health, and well-being.”

Svetlana Petriyчук faces up to seven years in prison.

1. Right now, as a person who has been attacked by absurdity. :) But in general, it’s important to me to be and remain a human being who has not lost her dignity.
2. Like any writer, I believe that with words one can solve more problems than many people realize.

3. As a rule, on a single feeling: do I want to be inside some process/event or not?

4. To be in the right place. In every sense. And to feel accordingly.

5. Riding in the car with my husband and our dog along roads we've never taken before. And right now, the sorts of books that neither the clank of iron locks, nor the Turkish sitcoms in our cell can distract me from.

6. That everyone around me has suddenly given themselves permission to be vicious.

7. Moments and epochs when the state becomes more important than the individual.

8. A sense of freedom and the absence of fear.

9. Even though I always dreamed of being a film director, it's still literature.

10. I've never had a favorite quote, but Jerzy Lec's decadent "Well, let's say you did smash through the wall with your head—what would you do in the next cell?" often comes to mind here. :)

11. When I was 18, in my third year of university, I received permission to attend lectures as I saw fit. I stayed home for eight months, reading almost 24/7. There were many

very different books. That mosaic formed me. I still contain a piece of each and every book.

12. I've never wanted to live like someone else. But when reading a book or play, I often think: "I want to write like (fill in your favorite author)." :)

13. A country I know much less about than I thought I did.

Igor Borisovich POKUSIN (b. 1962)



Ukrainian; born and raised in Odessa. Became a Russian citizen decades ago. Igor Pokusin lived in the city of Abakan, in the republic of Khakassia (over 2,500 miles east of Moscow). Civil activist; poet; former civil aviation pilot. Head of “HowLong?!”, a social movement representing the interests of Khakassian residents abused by law enforcement. In March 2022, security cameras caught Pokusin

painting over a pro-war symbol (Z) and writing “Glory to Ukraine” on the wall of a local museum. He was charged with “vandalism” and forbidden to leave Abakan for six months. In July 2022, he was detained in Krasnoyarsk, tortured and threatened into “confessing” that he had planned to go to Ukraine. He was under house arrest until December 8, 2022, when he was sent to pre-trial detention on charges of “attempted treason” (Article 275 of the Russian Criminal Code). Though Pokusin has two prosthetic joints and a stent in his heart, the prosecution claims that he meant to join the Ukrainian Armed Forces and fight against Russia.

On January 19, 2024, a Siberian court sentenced Igor Pokusin to eight years and one month in a strict-regime penal colony.

I’m honestly flabbergasted by this attention to and support for me personally. I wasn’t expecting it.

Grigory, hello! Thank you for your letter! Your admiration for my fearlessness is, in my opinion, over-

stated. How easy it is, as it turns out, to sit in prison for the truth. I come from the hero-city of Odessa, spent my first 21 years there and studied to be a civil aviation pilot. After that I was sent to work in Russia, in Abakan. I married (more than once, true), fathered three sons, and so became attached to the country. Then suddenly, out of a clear blue sky, my father's homeland is warring with my mother's and mine! Now, how can a normal person become a man-kurt [unthinking slave] and kill his mother? I went and shared my opinion—wrote it on a museum wall. And it was downhill from there, abhorrent...

When I was still in high school, I started writing poetry and even received an award (*Igor Pokusin—Poet of Russia 2016*) at a national competition. So I'm continuing the traditions of Russian poets, something I'm secretly proud of. I have a page [with my poems] on the stih.ru site. Now, if you'll allow me, here is "Barabbas":

A brave brash friend of mine,
 whose conscience, they said, was clear,
Did not know, but loved Barabbas,
 by denying Christ...
Tell me now, teacher,
 whose faith is this procession?!
If in the first plebiscite
 the people chose Barabbas?

1. I'm a poet-pilot.
2. In the power of the word and in my wife.
3. I'm a romantic, so I trust my soul.
4. Not to betray the heroes of one's songs.
5. That I survived the crash of my little airplane.
6. The conflict between my homelands.
7. The division of humanity into countries.
8. The division of humanity into countries.
9. Verse (the concentration of words).
10. "Conscience is a rational feeling, while shame is the feeling of nausea."
11. There are a lot of them, I can't offend anyone—
"that means you read the books you needed as a child"
(Vysotsky).
12. Probably Janusz Korczak.
13. I'd better keep quiet; my sentence is still to come.

You know, Grigory Shalvovich, I'm still proud that I managed to write a letter to Mikhail Ancharov [1923-1990] and thank him for his books! And here I am writing to you! And as I now thank you for your position, your courage, and your books, I catch myself thinking: was it an accident

what happened to me? Perhaps I'd been preparing for this my whole life? "Lyubka did not kneel down and took a bullet in the face" (*The Young Guard* by Alexander Fadeyev). By the way, Krasnodon [where Fadeyev's novel takes place] is in Ukraine.

Oh, how I wish I could spend a long evening talking to you... Who knows God's ways... Or maybe I could tell you some stories myself. After all, my four plane crashes prove that there is a God....

Or, if you like, I could sell you a plot for two dollars (like Jack London) for a sci-fi story.

Lyudmila Alexandrovna RAZUMOVA
(b. 1967)



Lived in the town of Novozavidovsky, in the Tver Region. Has three children from her first marriage; now in a civil union with Alexander Martynov. Both are artists; both have been imprisoned for anti-war graffiti (e.g. Putler Kaput; Peace to Ukraine; Ukraine, forgive us). According to the investigation, in March 2022, Martynov and Razumova took prepared paint and stencils to Mokshino, Veraksino,

Teshilovo, Mirny and Novozavidovsky in the Tver Region, where “they committed desecration of the Russian Armed Forces.” They also “posted on their open social network page videos from unofficial sources that contain false information about the use of the Russian Armed Forces for the destruction of Ukrainian cities and civilians.”

On March 29, 2022, Lyudmila Razumova and Alexander Martynov were detained on charges of “vandalism” (Article 214 of the Russian Criminal Code) and “public dissemination of false information about the Russian Armed Forces on grounds of political and ideological hatred or enmity” (Article 207.3).

In court Razumova said: “Putin is proud that our weapons are without equal in the world. Wouldn’t it be better to take pride in healthcare? Or in education, income levels, or pensions? We don’t need them to be ‘without equal in the world.’ It would be fine if they were merely adequate. But as of today, all we have is ‘greatness’ — and a sea of vodka. Our ‘greatness’ makes us proud, and the vodka

keeps our spirits up. Dissidents go to jail. People who still have an opinion have their lives broken.”

On March 17, 2023, Lyudmila Razumova and Alexander Martynov were sentenced to 7 and 6.5 years in prison, respectively. At the sentencing, Razumova spoke her “last word”: “I was scared of the war, of how it might end for all of us. I was brought up to believe that war is the worst thing people can make. Where is my fault in that? I don’t think the video I shared is fake.... When I see Kharkiv being bombed, that means to me that Kharkiv is being bombed. And nothing else.... And yes, I’m afraid, as a woman and a human being. A human being! Not as a slave. A free and honest human being.”

1. A woman.

2. In the triumph of sanity.

3. More on my gut feeling.

4. Home.

5. Again it’s Home. Home is my family, my dog and cat, my garden in the mist in the early morning, it’s coffee, and bullfinches on the birch tree, and also the smell of freshly baked bread and the sound of rain on the roof. Now I would give half my life for all that, maybe even more.

6. My unfreedom and the unfreedom of my Russia.

7. The answer to this question is also unfreedom. I know that now for a fact.

8. Love. When a person has no love, he is poor spiritually, unhappy and vicious. It’s sad when such a person lives in your neighborhood, and frightening when such

people are in power. Without love there is no future, and so only love will save the world.

9. Literature, movies, music.

10. I love this this from *Alice in Wonderland*: “If everybody minded their own business, the world would go round a deal faster than it does.” How apropos, isn’t that so?

11. *War and Peace* and all of Lev Nikolayevich [Tolstoy]. It’s like an encyclopedia of all life. He was a genius, and he made Russia famous, as did Pushkin, Lermontov, Dostoevsky and others who were in opposition to the government.

12. Those are my role models from the past. And from the present, my role models are all those who do not keep silent, do not hide behind other people’s backs, those who are in tune with their conscience and who love Russia truly, without hysteria and slogans, but quietly and with all their heart. I met one such person in the Tver pre-trial detention center: Andrei Trofimov [p. 351], a man of honor, courage and nobility.

13. A feast in time of plague for some, while others wait for the happiness of peace and light. There are more of the latter, and they will triumph. Love and sanity will prevail.

Timofei Alexandrovich RUDENKO (b. 1992)



A former military psychologist and officer, Timofei Rudenko condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine in a post on VKontakte and in comments on Telegram. He was first detained on May 7, 2022, at the Moscow apartment where he lived with his longtime girlfriend and her family. The police, he said, tried to force him to confess to planning a terrorist attack for May 9 (Victory Day). When Rudenko

refused, they charged him with "hooliganism" and jailed him for 10 days. Rudenko was repeatedly subjected to administrative arrests of 10-15 days over the next year; he was beaten, tortured with electric shocks and threatened with rape. Meanwhile, Rudenko's girlfriend and her family left Moscow and returned to their native Kyrgyzstan. On May 18, 2023, Rudenko was detained outside Zhukovsky Airport: he had a ticket to Bishkek, the Kyrgyz capital. He was kept in administrative detention until July 21, 2023, then charged under Article 205.2 of the Russian Criminal Code ("justifying terrorism"). He faces up to seven years in prison.

On February 6, 2024, according to OVD-Info, Rudenko was ordered to undergo compulsory psychiatric treatment.

Good evening, dear comrade Grigory Shalvovich. Of course, I cannot speak about many things directly. When I'm released from prison, I'll be able to speak about what is happening in my own words. For now, I can only answer the questions in the AUTO-GRAPH questionnaire.

1. There is a hero in some work, Danko, who tore out his heart. [In “Old Izergil” by Maxim Gorky]
2. I believe that in the vast herd of humanoids there are still decent people worth fighting for, leading them to the truth.
3. When making important decisions, you need to rely on both your reason and your feelings.
4. To sow seeds of goodness and light in people’s souls, to fight for truth and justice.
5. When seeds of goodness sprout in lost souls.
6. It’s saddening to see many of the things that are happening where I am (broadly speaking).
7. An unwillingness to fight for one’s future; an inability to think for oneself; a slavish obedience at the genetic level; a loss of courage and spirit.
8. A sustainable approach to the natural environment and the animal world.
9. I’m something of a creator of art myself: I’ve been writing poetry for over twenty years. I want to learn to draw women. I like to listen to different kinds of music.

10. At this time, I'm particularly suited to the quote "*Lupus pilum mutat, non mentem*" ("A wolf can change his coat, but not his nature"). And also "*Zhashoonun chyndygy yuyn kyrøshthø*" ("The meaning of life is in the fight for truth and justice").

11. I don't have a most important book. But I really liked [Bulgakov's] *The Master and Margarita*.

12. I guess I don't have a role model. I have my own path in life.

13. I can't answer this question in any politically correct way. Even carefully chosen words will be interpreted aggressively when this letter is checked. In my years of living under the current regime, I've become sincerely convinced that the only way to reach apolitical members of Russian society is the way in the parable about Moses, who led the Jews through the desert for 40 years, until all those who had the desire to be slaves in their genes and blood died out and only those who were born truly free people, not enslaved by anyone, were left. (See the Book of Exodus.)

I'll be awaiting your reply.

Ildar Ildusovich SADRIYEV (b. 1991)



Lived in the city of Nizhnekamsk, in Tatarstan. Has two children. Arrested on September 17, 2021. One of 11 defendants from seven regions of Russia in the case against the “What Is to Be Done!” Telegram channel. Searches were conducted in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Nizhnekamsk, Nizhny Novgorod Region, Tomsk, Sochi and Krasnoyarsk. All 11 defendants were charged under Article 212 of the

Russian Criminal Code (“instigation of mass riots”) and Article 282 (“incitement to hatred by an organized group”). The prosecution alleges they meant to “psychologically influence” voters ahead of State Duma elections (September 17-19, 2021).

The other 10 defendants are: Vyacheslav Abramov (p. 95), Dmitry Chebanov, Zhanna Chernova, Nikita Kreshchuk, Alexei Kurlov (p. 225), Igor Kuznetsov, Dmitry Lamanov, Igor Nagibin (p. 255), Maria Platonova, and Alexei Yanochkin (p. 388).

Hello. I am very honored by your interest in me and happy to answer your questions.

1. I’m a human being, first and foremost. From childhood, my father taught me that no matter where I was, in no matter what situation, I must always remain a human

being. In my understanding, a human being is honest with himself, first of all, and fair, which generally determines whether he has honor and dignity.

2. I believe in what I see and feel.

3. When making important decisions, I believe that one cannot rely on one of those things only, there must be a balance between reason and inner feelings. After all, if something is reasonable, but causes a lot of negative emotions, why do you need it? And if something is unreasonable, but causes a storm of positive emotions, the positive emotions will sooner or later come to naught and may be replaced by negative ones.

4. The most important thing in life is life itself, in all respects. I don't think it's possible to single out some aspect of it and put it in the main role, everything must be in moderation, otherwise in certain circumstances life will slow down, and one won't be able to get the lost time back. In different situations one favors completely different things, and this happens, if you think about it, every day. The most important thing today may not even be in the top ten tomorrow.

5. Love brings me the most joy. Love that is pure,

sincere in all its manifestations and for everything. I believe that joy without love is impossible.

6. Injustice.

7. Injustice.

8. Justice.

9. Music.

10. I guess not.

11. All books, basically.

12. Of course. My father.

13. I love Russia. To me, Russia is my home. And, as with any home, one sometimes has to make repairs and get rid of the parasites.

Ivan Ivanovich SAFRONOV (b. 1990)



Muscovite. Journalist. Like his father before him, a journalist also named Ivan Safronov (1956-2007), Safronov Jr. covered military affairs for Kommersant. He left the paper under pressure in 2019, then briefly worked as media advisor to the head of the state space agency Roskosmos. On his way to work on July 7, 2020, Safronov was detained and later accused of “treason” (Article 275 of the Russian Criminal Code) for

allegedly passing military secrets to Czech intelligence and to German citizen Demuri Voronin. Safronov, who called the charges a “travesty of justice,” rejected a plea deal: a 12-year sentence in exchange for a confession of guilt. Days later, on September 5, 2022, he was sentenced to 22 years in a strict-regime penal colony.

Safronov, considered an expert on the Russian military, believes that he is being punished for his work as a journalist.

One of his lawyers, Dmitry Talantov (p. 343), was arrested for “discrediting the Russian Armed Forces.”

1. I am a person who is in prison, but who even in prison tries to find a little freedom. And I do.

2. I believe in justice: that every act that affects people adversely will be evaluated by history.

3. My gut feeling is my best advisor. It was that feeling that told me that I must not acquiesce to the crazy accusations, but must fight to the end. And I have no regrets.

4. The main thing in life is the health of your family and friends. When you're separated from them, you understand this still more keenly and distinctly. You don't worry about yourself—you're already in prison.

5. Letters from the outside. The voices of my family. Coffee. A cigarette.

6. What's going on in Russia. And in a neighboring country.

7. The greatest evil, in my opinion, to man and mankind is caused by the exorbitant ambitions of certain people in power, who are ready to sacrifice everything and everyone for the sake of their personal "achievements".

8. The greatest benefit is brought by a peace in which there is no room for hostilities.

9. Music. My dream is to hear my favorite music on my headphones. Music that I would put on myself, and not the rubbish they played in the exercise yard of Lefortovo. That would be real magic for me.

10. “Do what you must, and come what may!” The absolute quintessence of my worldview.

11. It’s very hard to say: I’ve read hundreds of books while in prison. Of these, the most memorable have been Tolstoy’s *Resurrection*, Nabokov’s *Laughter in the Dark*, and *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

12. It’s hard for me to choose just one person, to be honest. In my life I’ve tried to take something of the best from every person I admire. If we take a writer, for example, then I consider Varlam Shalamov to be the worthiest of men. If we take a politician, then it’s Boris Yeltsin: he was at the helm of a huge country at an exceedingly difficult time, he made many mistakes, but he gave people freedom—and never once acted as its strangler.

13. “An oak is a tree. A rose is a flower. A deer is an animal. A sparrow is a bird. Russia is our fatherland. Death is inevitable.” [Nabokov’s epigraph for *The Gift*]

Vladimir Andreyevich SERGEYEV (b. 1985)



Moved to Moscow from Omsk in 2015. Worked at NAMI (automotive institute) making car parts. Vladimir Sergeyev was detained with Anton Zhuchkov (p. 134) on March 6, 2022. The friends were on their way to an unsanctioned anti-war protest on Pushkin Square where they intended to commit suicide. “I felt a terrible fear for Russia and its future,” Sergeyev told investigators, “as well as for the lives of the soldiers,

both ours and Ukrainian.” Before killing himself, Sergeyev had planned to burn an empty police van. (Molotov cocktails were found in his backpack.) Instead, he took a lethal dose of methadone in front of the police and wound up in Sklifosovsky Hospital.

On March 17, 2022, Sergeyev was discharged from hospital, arrested, and eventually charged with “preparation of a terrorist act with a group of persons working in collusion” (Article 205 of the Russian Criminal Code).

On April 20, 2023, he was sentenced to eight years: three years in prison and then five years in a strict-regime penal colony.

Very glad to receive Boris Akunin’s letter.

Hello, Grigory Shalvovich! Your idea of a questionnaire strikes me as strange, but at the same time fresh and witty. The questions are not easy; they require a great capacity for reflection. But I’ll give it a try.

1. To answer this question, we must first define what life is. Is life a struggle? No, I don't agree. Life does involve struggles too, but it contains even more things that are strange and incomprehensible. It seems to me that life is a kind of journey. On the one hand, we direct ourselves somewhere; on the other hand, we follow beaten paths and depend on the prevailing winds. Our journey depends on us only in part. In that case, I'm [primarily] a fearless traveler and adventurer. And only secondarily a militant liberal and perfectionist.

2. I don't believe in anything. I merely suppose the probability [of this or that]. I'm not sure there is a God, just as I'm not sure there is no God. But if there is a God, he's not what the clergy make him out to be. He doesn't want us to build temples, fall on our knees, and print holy books. He created us out of boredom and wants us to entertain him. He likes it when we use our full potential, when we accomplish things on the edge of human possibility. That's the most fun for him. Or maybe he doesn't exist and we're just cosmic dust. I'm fine either way.

3. I'm not satisfied with the question itself, so I'll approach it in a somewhat roundabout way. Mind and feelings are properties of our consciousness, and I'm not sure there's a clear line between them. They exist at one and the same moment and are not mutually exclusive. Rather, a conflict arises between different feelings when a choice we've made leads to an equivocal result. About such a result, we say, "I have mixed feelings." The mind can also come into conflict with itself when it seeks a path to a single goal and tries to find the least forbidden and fastest option among many. But the original question is not without meaning. Perhaps it refers to a situation in which a strong feeling drives us towards a goal, the path to which is beyond the grasp of reason, that is, a situation of "I want to, but I don't know how." So I see the question differently: can you go after what you want without a clear plan? Can you make a decision that carries potentially great risks? Yes, I can.

4. The most important thing in life is to act and live in such a way that you don't regret anything.

5. My greatest joy comes from inventing a crazy idea, finding like-minded people, and succeeding and reaping the rewards together. The joy of the collective is greater than the joy of the sum of its individual members.

6. What saddens me most is that in times of war and upheaval many good people die. And the altruists die first. Perhaps my response is a result of the distortion of my views by recent events, the so-called Special Military Operation [in Ukraine].

7. The greatest evil of all is nuclear weapons. Before they were invented, there were big wars, which is bad in itself. But to wage war, you had to have an economy, and to have an economy you had to have social institutions, rights, competition, science, medicine. That is, the desire to wage war contributed indirectly to progress. The constant threat of war encouraged backward states to develop and borrow social institutions from more developed ones. Whereas now, a few warheads guarantee sovereignty and you need almost nothing to maintain them. So you can drive your country to rack and ruin—and live like that for decades. Yes, I'm talking about North Korea. And about Russia,

which is going the same way. And in general, when the fate of humanity depends on a bunch of heinous manikins, it is sad.

8. The greatest benefit to humanity comes from competition: economic, political, scientific—whatever kind you like. This is true both at the level of individuals, and at the level of entire states.

9. Music has the strongest effect on me. Experimental, avant-garde, extreme—all of it.

10. One of my favorite quotes is the Roman adage: “If you want peace, prepare for war.” Except that now we have war upon war, and nothing but war. So let’s say I don’t have a favorite quote.

11. I’ve read my most important books in prison. “Ward No. 6”, Chekhov’s short story, is a parable of humanism. Its theme is not new, but there will never be enough of it. I would also like to mention *Civilization: The West and the Rest* by the popular historian Niall Ferguson. It’s a book about the history of the emergence of social institutions and their adoption in different parts of the globe. It changed my ideas about the world and made a small, but

significant shift in my worldview. These books can't be compared—they're apples and oranges. And I can't choose between them.

12. Winston Churchill. In 1939, Great Britain decided to go to war with the Third Reich. There was no immediate urgency, Britain was clearly not the next potential victim after Poland, and there was a rational justification for not fighting Germany. The British government hesitated, but Churchill had the courage and discernment to see the Third Reich as an extremely dangerous enemy in the long term. It was his inspiring speech that influenced Parliament's decision to declare war. Churchill did not promise an easy victory. He said there would be "blood, sweat and tears." After the defeat of France, Britain was left on its own against Germany; other countries entered the war later.

13. Russia today is like ancient Persia, beating the sea with whips. An enemy of civilization.

Thank you for your support! Be well!

Mikhail Yurievich SIMONOV (b. 1960)



A Russian Orthodox Christian. Born in Voronezh. Worked for Russian Railways as a restaurant-car director. Of late, he had lived in Belarus between shifts. On November 9, 2022, Simonov came to Moscow to see friends. He was detained that same day on charges of “knowingly disseminating false information about the Russian Armed Forces on grounds of political hatred” (Article 207.3

of the Russian Criminal Code—signed into law in March 2022 by Vladimir Putin, a few weeks after his invasion of Ukraine).

According to the legal aid group Net Freedoms Project, the case against Simonov was based on two comments he posted on VKontakte about the bombing of Kyiv and of the Mariupol Drama Theater: “Women and children murdered, and we’re singing songs on Channel One. We, Russia, have become godless. Forgive us, Lord!” and “Russian pilots are bombing children.”

Mikhail Simonov, who is hard of hearing and speaks with difficulty, suffers from chronic conditions (prostatitis, coronary heart disease and hypertension).

On March 30, 2023, Simonov was sentenced to seven years in a general-regime penal colony. On January 18, 2024, his sentence was reduced by six months.

Hello, Grigory Shalvovich! Of course, I wanted to answer! And at least to thank you! I’d like to emphasize:

whatever happened and is happening to me, I considered and consider myself an ordinary non-public citizen of Russia, who has lived a very ordinary life. Of course, I was born in one country [the Soviet Union], and I'll die in a somewhat different country. But that doesn't change anything! I went to school, was a Young Pioneer, then a Komsomol member, then... Well, then everything changed! But work, my daily bread, children, family—all these basic principles remained the same!!! Yes, I had interests, literature... All kinds—whatever I could get my hands on! The history of Russia, the USSR... Well, politics! Insofar as it was available, possible. [My reading] didn't interfere with my everyday life. I had certain opinions, beliefs, so what? Who doesn't? We are, after all, reasonable people. I was interested in religion when it was prohibited. Then, when suddenly everyone became a believer... I withdrew. The scientific point of view became more interesting. Now, of course, in prison, it seems impossible to survive at times without faith and prayer. Don't you think that my loss of faith must make it even harder for me to accept my seven years in the camps? Now I'll try to answer your questionnaire. Perhaps not all the questions, there are difficulties.

1. This question I have just answered.

2. I believe that even if God does not exist as the creator of the universe, he is within us! There must be justice.

3. I can't answer this. Can't one's reason be one's gut feeling?

4. Here's another quandary. Or maybe, as in the Soviet hit song: "I love you, life, and want you to become better"?

5. I think my answers as someone sentenced to seven years, someone who has already spent nine months in prison, will not be the same as the answers I would give on the outside. I hope you understand that. So then, my joys are your letters and other letters from friends and family, which are my only informational thread of connection to the [outside] world.

6. In prison, this word is not spoken, it is taboo.

7. Undoubtedly, the distortion of History.

8. "...For mercy upon the fallen I have called." [From Pushkin's "*Exegi monumentum*"]

9. Maybe ballet. I don't know, classic blues...

10. Without books, without the means to refresh a prison-clouded memory... Although—come to think of it! "Truth, for some reason, triumphs. For some reason, after the fact. But for some reason, it always does."

(Aleksandr Volodin) Or more topical: “In prison, like it or not, you have to sit.” (Sergei Dovlatov) I’m not sure I’ve got that exactly right.

11. There are just endless numbers of them!!! Unexpectedly, in prison, E. M. Remarque’s *The Night in Lisbon* has seemed important.

12. Writer? Varlam Shalamov. Man? I’m not sure, maybe [opposition politician] Yevgeny Roizman. Perhaps I should add my father and mother? Who survived and lived a remarkable life, marred by war.

13. I don’t know! What do I feel, sitting in a small cell in a detention center? Maybe Russia to me is what it was to our ancestors? To the heroes of your books, to Fandorin? Maybe that’s the answer.

Let me say again that, since I’m in prison, I found it difficult to answer your questions or simply could not find an answer! They stirred up too much emotion! I have written as best I could. Thank you so much for your concern.

Mikhail

I’m not saying goodbye!

Dmitry Nikolayevich SKURIKHIN (b. 1974)



Lived in the Leningrad Region, where he ran his own food shop. Father of five; municipal deputy till he condemned Putin’s annexation of Crimea. In 2021, while serving 20 days after a rally in support of Navalny, Skurikhin bet a cellmate that he would not shave so long as Putin was in power. On March 6, 2022, he wrote on Telegram: “Putin and his gang are a cancerous tumor that has engulfed

all of Russia and now is spreading... Let’s stop this disease, stop this plague! No to war in Ukraine!” He plastered his shopfront with anti-war slogans. In September 2022, a criminal case was opened against him for “repeatedly discrediting” the Russian Armed Forces (Article 280.3 of the Russian Criminal Code). On February 24, 2023, the first anniversary of the invasion, he knelt down outside his shop with a placard that said: “Forgive us, Ukraine.” He took a picture and posted it. He was detained the next day and later put under house arrest.

On August 3, 2023, Dmitry Skurikhin was sentenced to 18 months in a general-regime penal colony.

Hello Grigory Shalvovich! Thank you for your support, your praise and warm words. When a celebrity praises you, it’s invigorating. You may be interested to know that, in the cell where I am now, some 200-250 men have passed through, and all of them understood me, my motives, my goals. Those who support the current regime

you can count on the fingers of one hand here. Whereas I am in the majority. Although, of course, this may be just my feeling. But that I've already received over a hundred letters of support and not a single scolding letter—that's a fact. And also there was this little "scene": they brought to our quarantine cell this big old recidivist now sentenced to life imprisonment (he'd escaped a few times). He had such a hard look and growl that he simply terrified all the quarantine inmates (eight, including your humble servant). My position in the cell at the time was fairly precarious, it wasn't exactly "sink or swim", but something like that. So there we were sitting at the table, getting acquainted, asking each other who was in for what, and when I made my presentation, this wolfman got up from his bunk and said: "Oh, a political [prisoner]! Never seen one before! I respect you! Let me look at you!" He pummeled his heart with his fist and shook my hand. An hour later he was taken away. He'd been put in our cell by mistake. He had no business being with first-timers like us. But to say that after that I was king of that cell is to say nothing. Let me now try to answer your questions.

1. I've been a self-employed entrepreneur for 27 years; a happy husband and five-time dad for 25 years; a regional social and political activist for 18 years. When I say this in prison, they ask, "So who are you?" I say: "Do you know who Navalny is?" "Well, yeah." "I'm the local Navalny." "Oh, now I get it." In my political views, I am a liberal, a democrat (only please don't confuse me with LDPR!). While the PARNAS party existed, I was its activist; while the Open Russia movement existed, I was its coordinator in the Leningrad Region.

2. I have a scientific worldview and sufficient knowledge for it. But emotionally I would like to believe (and sometimes I even do believe) in justice (that somehow someday it will triumph) and in people's good will. I do not believe in god.

3. On both. My gut feeling, desire, passion (whatever you want to call it) makes my mind work towards the goal. When you realize that your life depends on a certain decision, all of your body's powers and resources are engaged. This is not a decision about what kind of loaf of bread to bake. My reason, of course, has the final say.

4. Love and happiness. My love for my wife, my children, parents, sisters, other relatives and theirs for me; the happiness and life of these people and of myself.

5. Successful creative work—everything from having and raising children, building stores, houses and businesses, to growing potatoes. You're happy when you realize that you've achieved what you planned, even if it's just the satisfaction of knowing that, as a result of your actions, political scoundrels were not able to steal votes during elections and thus distort the will of the people. Both the work itself and its result (successful, of course) bring joy.

Olga Borisovna SMIRNOVA (b. 1968)



Lived in St. Petersburg. Artist; architect. Widow, no children. Comes from a family that survived the Siege of Leningrad by Nazi Germany (1941-44). Civil activist and co-founder of the Peaceful Resistance group. On May 5, 2022, Smirnova’s apartment was raided—as were the apartments of four other PR members (Tatiana Sichkareva, Ilya Tkachenko, Vlad Shipitsyn, and Asan Mumdzhi).

The four others were questioned and released. On May 6, 2022, Olga Smirnova was detained and charged with “discrediting the Russian Armed Forces” (Article 207.3 of the Russian Criminal Code). She had published seven anti-war posts (e.g. “the Russian Army is reducing Ukrainian cities to ruins”) on Democratic Petersburg—Peaceful Resistance, a group on the social network VKontakte. The group had over 12,000 subscribers before it was blocked on March 21, 2022.

Smirnova became a serious activist in 2014, after Russia’s annexation of Crimea. She joined the Solidarity movement and the Democratic Petersburg coalition. In 2015, she co-created Strategy-18, a regular action in support of Crimean Tatars that took place (until her arrest in May 2022) on the 18th of every month (in memory of May 18, 1944, when Stalin’s deportations of Tatars from Crimea began). According to the organizers of Strategy-18, Crimean Tatars have been oppressed in present-day Russia since 2014.

As part of her “last word” at trial, Smirnova said: “Yes, I’m an enemy, an outspoken enemy. And a hereditary one. I’ve never forgiven this evil power for my grandmother’s three brothers, who were sent to camps for 10 years for singing a ditty about Five Year Plans. Only one of them came back in 1956. I’ve never forgiven the 10 years my great-grandmother’s sister spent in a lumber camp for working in her vegetable garden on May 1st and joking about ‘fulfilling her own Five Year Plan’. My laughing at the pompous pathetic nonsense [in this courtroom] is also hereditary. But my hostility does not mean that I would resort to such a humiliating (for me) method as slander.”

Two weeks later, on August 30, 2023, more than 40 people came to support Smirnova at her sentencing: six years in a general-regime penal colony. “For shame!” they cried when the sentence was read out. “I love you all,” she replied.

“That a criminal case was brought is unjust,” said Smirnova’s friend, Crimean Tatar Asan Mumdzhi. “The sentence is unjust. But there are more unjust things still: what’s going on in Ukraine is a catastrophe. We’re drowning in a catastrophe.”

Special thanks to Grigory Shalvovich for his support. You can tell him that in our cell there was always a waiting list for Boris Akunin’s detective stories.)) And now I will answer the questions in his AUTO-GRAPH questionnaire.

1. Who am I? I suppose I’m a fairly standard member of my generation, a person who made all my generation’s mis-

takes, but will never forget the feeling of freedom at the outset [under Gorbachev and Yeltsin]. Even if that freedom was only a “demo version,” it made me organically incapable of living in any version of an “artificial paradise” built on self-deception.

2. I believe in human civilization’s ability to overcome dangerous impasses and continue on the path of knowledge and creativity. And I believe in God, who created this self-developing system, giving each individual freedom of choice within their allotted time and space. Both [beliefs] are, it seems to me, banal. But this is a case when you needn’t look for an original solution.))

3. If there’s discord between my reason and my gut feeling, I make no decisions at all, important or not. I continue to observe and evaluate the situation. “Purely rational” decisions turn out to be, on inspection, as stupid as impulsive ones made in a fit of rage. But the time it takes to get the necessary information always pays off later: then you have calm confidence without inner discord. As for those rare cases when you have to act in a split second, you

have your instinct. Instinct has nothing to do with gut feelings or reason, but it's indispensable in emergency situations.

4. The most important thing in life is to live.)) That sounds ridiculous. I know. But given how many times I've had to explain the attractiveness of such an activity as "living", and how many times I've failed, I have no other answer. The human imagination has produced over the centuries a plethora of tempting substitutes for this "form of existence of protein bodies" [Engels]. Except that their use leads to an inner desolation.

5. Joy comes from those moments of understanding and concurrence with other people. By this I mean not only direct "live" communication, but also indirect communication—through the imprints in the material world of human souls who have come before us. Not only art, though it is the most visible, but culture as a whole in its material manifestation.

6. The most saddening thing is disintegration and destruction, the reduction of logical and solid systems to chaos. Most painful of all is to see the degradation of people close to me, a degradation that I am powerless to stop. To feel the ground slipping away from under my feet,

the ground that was my homeland. That is also inexpressibly painful. But refusing to live this pain would mean refusing to engage in such an activity as life, and, as I said before, I like that activity.

7. The greatest evil is in human hubris, the inability to accept the optimal when the ideal is unattainable. Hence this arrogant desire to remake human nature according to some grandiose project of total perfection. The wit or stupidity of the project plays no role. Its essence is in the desire to complete Creation and put a stop to [further] development. These stops occur easily in various dusty, gray and moldy corners. Utopias end in anti-utopias with the physical elimination of those who sneeze from the dust and who see the mold as just mold.

8. The benefit, or rather the prerequisite for any benefit, lies in the most ordinary honesty. It assumes an openness to new information, the easy reversal of unfortunate decisions, a readiness to recognize one's own lack of knowledge and capabilities. It assumes a search and respect for what was discovered earlier by other people, but also a willingness to relinquish those discoveries in favor of still others, without losing respect for the forerunners. Honesty

opens up the possibility of loving what is far from perfect and of feeling a connection between all those who are alive and those who have died, without overestimating, but also without nullifying, one's own influence on them.

9. Literature and music have the strongest effect on me. I can't choose between them.

10. "We wanted to make things better, but they turned out the way they always do." (Chernomyrdin).

11. There is no most important book, nor is there likely to be. But every book that has influenced me appeared by some miracle in my life at just the right time. The most recent being *Lame Fate* and *The Final Circle of Paradise* by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. Two weeks before that I had reread *The Master and Margarita* for the fourth time, because there was a waiting list for the other books. But this rereading turned out to be important, not only because our perceptions change with age, but because *Lame Fate* is punctuated with references to Bulgakov's novel and even debates with it: there is "neither light, nor peace" as a reward, whereas the creative person's nagging and gnawing dissatisfaction mixed with

momentary discoveries of the exact facet of expression—*that* is happiness. I guess so.))

12. I don't have any role models. The strangest thing is, I didn't have any in childhood either. I didn't want to imitate anyone. It wasn't that I felt I was "cooler" than everyone else, it was just greed: you can't learn everything you admire if you choose one and only one ideal.)) As an adult, I sometimes varied my life by copying, in a particular situation, the style of someone I liked. Most often it was directly related to my creative work, but sometimes I played roles in life. But I don't see that as imitation. It's more of a stylization. More like a game with a conscious entry and exit.

13. I see today's Russia solely as an ersatz Russia. Of course, I'm not talking about all the people who happen to live on the territory of the Russian Federation or on territories controlled by the Russian Federation. I don't mean the sum of individuals with their will and their needs, which one considers and calls a country, but only an organized whole acting in the outside world. And there

is only one such whole now. It is that Russia, which, in the words of Deputy Speaker Volodin, “Putin is”. There’s no point in estimating what percentage of Russia’s adult population supports Putin, since nothing else has any impact. No other political force has assessed this impact, nor has it declared its own preferences. Why the alternatives to Putin collapsed so quickly is a separate question. However, they could not defend themselves, while the post-Soviet modernization project launched in 1991 ended in failure. Attempts to carefully restore and continue the best of what existed in historical Russia before the “times of historical materialism” [before the Soviet regime] failed along with that far-from-complete project. Of course, such attempts will be resumed one day and one of them will be successful.

But for now it makes sense to take a closer look at ersatz Russia since its peculiarity lies not only in that it happened without an outright re-invention of the state, but also in its essence. Or rather, the lack thereof. Concrete content was replaced by empty content. The ostensible West (with its liberalism) seemed to be pitted against the no less ostensible East (with its traditionalism). But the holy of holies for any traditional society is its compliance

with agreements and all associated concepts of honor. This is the first thing that [Putin's Russia] attacked, asserting its "sovereignty" with perfidious violations of international treaties. In this, [Putin's Russia] took pride.

The country that produced the proverbs "An agreement is worth more than money" and "What is written with a pen cannot be cut out with an axe" is Russia. The country that introduced the principle of non-bindingness into its Constitution by means of a national referendum is Russia. These two Russias are antipodes. There can be no question of any continuity of traditions, even if the weighted average percent of fraud and breach of obligations in both countries is the same. It never occurred to anyone before the 21st century to declare non-bindingness a social norm. In their break with tradition, these "traditionalists" have outdone all the "nihilists" of the 19th century.))) Perhaps they have a plan for "universal happiness" that would justify both their rejection of basic truths and [their shedding of] "blood according to conscience"? Or perhaps, at the very least, they have an imperial plan, since every empire, while suppressing the diversity of human communities, imposes in return its own model of orderly existence by fire and sword? Well, there is no plan. Of either kind.

[Putin and his henchmen] have nothing with which to replace what they destroyed while implementing their “global project”. The abundant potential that in centuries past gave rise to colonial wars is also gone. In its place there’s the fear of being destroyed, dismembered, enslaved and robbed, which suggests a highly skeptical assessment of one’s own potential. And, “so that no one touches us,” Russia must be surrounded by territories either without a population, or with a population completely controlled by a puppet government. There it is, the whole “global project”.))) Indeed, the anomalous zone that has arisen in place of Russia is quite unusual, though it possesses all the characteristic features of “classical” despotisms. Creating nothing, and expending resources accumulated before its emergence, ersatz Russia could exist for quite some time given how little it demands of its population. Even the “blood tax” for waging war is not so high in percentage terms, while soldiers see the war itself either as a “social lift” or as a high-risk game with high prize money in which they are not averse to seeking their fortune. To support this empty ersatz Russia is not so very hard for people to do. The main thing is not to try to give it meaning.)))

Meanwhile the dissolving of all moral constraints in so much pompous blather about spirituality makes it easy to exist in the void. There is nothing lighter than the lightness of non-being.)) Still, this anomaly is dangerous because of its nuclear weapons combined with this very lightness. Pray God these weapons won't be used before this ersatz collapses as a result of having "eaten up" all its resources. Then we'll have to conduct an inspection and rebuild everything, mourning the victims.

With best regards,

Olga

Maxim Nikolayevich SMYSHLYAEV (b. 1982)



Lived in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don. Known as a leftist. Worked at McDonald's while a correspondence student (sixth year) at Southern Federal University's Institute of History and International Relations. On April 22, 2016, Smyshlyaev was detained. At the time, the Russian state media were in the midst of an anti-Ukrainian campaign, initially launched in the spring of 2014,

following Russia's annexation of Crimea. Smyshlyaev was charged under Article 205.1 of the Russian Criminal Code ("aiding in the preparation of a terrorist act"). He had allegedly helped Artur Panov, a Ukrainian citizen, then 17, to prepare a terrorist act that never took place.

On December 5, 2015, Artur Panov, a native of Krasnodon in Ukraine's now Russian-controlled Luhansk Region, was detained by FSB officers in Rostov-on-Don. A blogger and Euromaidan activist, Panov had allegedly entered Russia twelve days earlier. According to the investigation, Panov had distributed anti-Putin leaflets in Luhansk and was now preparing a terrorist act in Rostov-on-Don. A search turned up an improvised explosive device, allegedly made by Panov. He also administered a Red Army Faction group on the social network VKontakte. He was later sentenced to nine years in a general-regime penal colony. In September 2019, Artur Panov was sent back to Ukraine in a prisoner exchange that included the Crimean-born filmmaker Oleh Sentsov.

Maxim Smyshlyaev had corresponded with Artur Panov on VKontakte in the fall of 2015. According to the Free Russia Foundation, the investigation has no evidence that Smyshlyaev saw his communications with Panov as preparation for a terrorist act. No prohibited items (weapons, explosives, etc.) were found in his home. The Memorial Human Rights Center holds that Smyshlyaev is being punished for his political views, not his actions.

On August 11, 2017, Smyshlaev was sentenced to 10 years in a strict-regime penal colony.

Hello, Grigory Shalvovich. Thank you for your words of support. Your books here, in conditions of unfreedom, brighten up our modest camp leisure time. It was a pleasure to receive a letter from such a brilliant man as you.

AUTO-GRAPH is an interesting endeavor, and I'm happy to take part. My answers to your questions:

1. I'm one of many people who never realized their dream of becoming a teacher.
2. In the rationality of existence and people's ability to live in a just society.
3. I rely on my reason, but don't always have time to mull over my decision. Then my feelings take command.

4. Life, destiny, memory, thoughts.
5. Another person's personal growth, achieved with my help.
6. The intentional degradation of a person.
7. Lack of culture, lack of cultivation.
8. Education.
9. Literature.
10. "You must live your life in such a way that later you won't have agonizing regrets about years lived without purpose." [*How the Steel Was Tempered* by Nikolai Ostrovsky]
11. Most recently, it's *11/22/63* by Stephen King. This book articulates very good values.
12. A few years ago, in the camp library, I found a biography of [Russian revolutionary] Nikolai Morozov. I was astounded by his self-sacrifice, his force of will, and his productivity in many fields of science.
13. There's a story by Viktor Pelevin called "Stoly-pin" [the Soviet-era train carriage for the transport of prisoners, still in use today]. This is now my metaphorical image [of Russia]: who knows where this carriage full of people who can't see past the end of their nose is going. And it's just for someone's amusement!

Yours,

Maxim

Ilya Andreyevich STARTSEV (b. 1986)



Lived in Orel. English teacher and writer. As a teenager he lived with his Russian mother and American stepfather in the United States, where he received citizenship. After college, Startsev returned to Russia. Acquaintances say he supported Alexei Navalny during the opposition leader's presidential campaign in 2018. The prosecution claims that Startsev also contributed to Navalny's

Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK), declared an "extremist" organization in June 2021 and banned in Russia. On September 6, 2023, Startsev was detained under Article 282.3 of the Russian Criminal Code ("financing" an extremist organization).

If convicted, he faces from three to eight years in prison.

1. My name is Ilya, I'm a Russian thinker, a human being.
2. I believe in many things, because for me, faith is positive, affirming an emotion or an emotional state that supports something or someone. The most relevant thing I believe in now is a beautiful Russia of the future. For my vision of this goal, I recommend you read my booklet on litres.ru, *Dlya prekrasnoi Rossii budushchego* (For the Beautiful Russia of the Future).

3. In making the most important decisions, I rely on my whole self, as expressed in two of my favorite aphorisms: Miguel de Unamuno's "I think with feeling and I feel with thought" and Henri Bergson's "Think like a man of action, act like a man of thought."

4. The most important thing in my life is self-development and honesty.

5. The people who bring me the most joy are those who think like me. They are my girlfriend Zoya and my loyal friends: Kirill, Pyotr, Yuri and Ilya.

6. What saddens me most is when people are separated and kept apart from each other, in an effort to destroy the relationship.

7. The greatest evil to man and mankind is brought by the outmoded Western-style system of technological civilization. It turns human lives into soulless numbers, meaningless hustle and bustle.

8. The greatest benefit is brought by nature, especially that which Eastern sages have discovered in themselves. Only by going into yourself can you attain absolute freedom.

9. Before entering prison, I loved different kinds of art: books, movies, video games. Video games had the strongest effect on me. I preferred the meditative ones, such as “Journey”, “Death Stranding”, and “Skyrim”. In prison I have only books, which I also love to read, because they stimulate my mind with new thoughts and ideas.

10. One of my favorite quotes related to my economic theory is a saying attributed to Jesus Christ in *The Urantia Book* [1955]: “Money does not love.” This idea is based on the maxim that you should live only for what gives you love, that is, you should devote your life to ends, not means.

11. The most important book I’ve read, one that changed my life forever, is *The Silmarillion* by J. R. R. Tolkien. I read it for the first time in English when I went to live in the United States at the age of 15. The imagination that that book generated in me became the basis for all my subsequent reflections and the “key” to understanding myself. Tolkien and I are truly of one mind.

12. There are three people whom I consider role models, two from the past and one from the present: Socrates, Jesus, and Alexei Navalny. Even their fates are roughly the same, as well as the fates of the states in which they lived.

13. Russia is now going through the terrifying agony of rebirth. Like a phoenix from the ashes, she will emerge in a new guise in the year of peak solar activity, the maximum since the beginning of this century, in 2026.

Alexander Alexeyevich STRUKOV (b. 1993)



Former photographer for Navalny headquarters in Moscow. Four weeks before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Strukov’s apartment was searched. On January 28, 2022, he was sent to pre-trial detention on charges of “incitement to hatred or enmity” (Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code) and “public calls for terrorist acts” (Article 205.2). The case against Strukov was based on comments he posted

(e.g. “Glory to Ukraine”, “Down with the power of the Chekists!”, “Good morning everyone, down with Putin!”) on the now-defunct Znak.com Telegram channel.

An “independent expert” found in Strukov’s comments “calls for terrorism, for the assassination of employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the FSB, members of the United Russia party, and Vladimir Putin personally.”

On November 3, 2023, Alexander Strukov was sentenced to eight years in a general-regime penal colony.

Hello. I am photographer-artist Alexander Strukov. I’ve been in pre-trial detention for 1 year and 7 months for my comments in a chat room, in fact “for dissent”.

1. The events of February 24, 2022, have divided society. What’s going on right now has changed my

attitude toward Russia, toward “the Russian people”, and the so-called Motherland. I’m overwhelmed with different feelings: from hatred to helplessness and doom. I am anyone at all, only not “Russian”, because my relatives and roots allow me to call myself whatever I want: some live in Ukraine, some in Poland (we still have my grandmother’s photographs from 1913 with Polish relatives).

2. I am definitely an “enemy of the people”. I feel that way myself, and my cellmates often joke about it and ironize. I try not to discuss politics in my cell, but even without that everyone knows my views. I condemn Russia’s actions. But I condemn society more, because the tragedy is happening with the tacit consent of the majority. Every day people die, the unacceptable happens. I’m trying to choose my words so that this text will pass the censorship. Society doesn’t care. People are only worried about their families, their jobs, their careers. They’ve put their well-being above that of a fragile world. They’ve shown selfishness and indifference. I want nothing to do with citizens of the Russian Federation. I would rather be an “enemy of the people” of this society than be a part of it

and have the same passport and flag. I'm sure that many people will disagree with me. Even in my cell there's another political prisoner who strongly disagrees with my views. Time will judge us.

I used to believe in a “bright future”. I thought that if you made an effort, you could change something, bring the necessary changes closer. Misconceptions, after all, are just a lack of knowledge. And that means that not everything is lost: you can try to inform people so that they will change their views. I love the science fiction of Arkady and Boris Strugatsky and their *Noon Universe*, light and pure. The idea of “progressorist” activities in society to educate people seemed possible to me. In 2016-17, there were many lectures, held by the Sakharov Center, the Libertarian Party of Russia, Open Russia, Golos, and other groups—and it was great. It united young people. Having been in pre-trial detention for 1 year and 7 months now, I have changed my views. Society's problem is much deeper. I can't imagine what would have to happen for something to begin to change here. The problem is people's mentality. The task is more complicated than, say, filming a report about the problems of a district or an oil refinery, or trying

to draw attention to the ecological situation at construction sites or in parks. For years I photographed rallies in Moscow and participated in volunteer political activities. I was also an election observer.

3. I try to make decisions on the basis of facts and logic, try to assess the situation in what seems to me a sensible way. But I often let my feelings and emotions run wild. It is my feelings that tell me the qualities of another person, who he is and what he's like. Humanity either exists in people, or it doesn't at all. I see that people can be as religious as they want, and at the same time act inhumanely.

4. To me, the main things in life are creativity and development, improving skills, learning new things, exploring the world around me. But because of the events happening now in real time, my priorities have shifted. The main thing is for the war to end, because under current conditions neither the happiness of my family and friends, nor anything else, is possible. Now the main thing is to have peace.

5. What makes me happy is success in achieving my own goals. Also my mother's health and well-being.

Bright, sunny days and fresh air. Nature, traveling, something new—such as the smell of a new book or photographic equipment. Anything that usually inspires me.

6. I'm saddened by injustice, hypocrisy, cowardice, baseness, ignorance, meanness, stupidity, cruelty, sadism, gratuitous aggression, and lack of compassion in people. I've observed all these qualities in society. This time of crisis has intensified them many times over and laid them bare.

7. People themselves bring the most evil to mankind with their neutrality, indifference, and detached attitude to common problems. Militarists, fanatics and aggressors wreak evil and destruction, clearly, but people's neutrality allows that evil to exist freely. We should not be unconcerned, should not stand aside when something terrible happens. We should be interested in the lives of other people. Maybe then the world will become a tiny bit better.

8. Books. The ability to transmit information and its accessibility benefit humanity. The availability of knowledge prevents obscurantism and misconceptions. Another benefit to society is that every generation is succeeded by another. :)

We can only hope that sooner or later everything will

change, that barbarism and aggression will recede into the past along with other archaisms of the modern age.

9. Music inspires me. I can spend days on end at my easel painting something born of my imagination. Nature inspires me, vast expanses.

10. Favorite quote: “Be so kind as to consider this question: What would your good do if evil did not exist, and how would the Earth look if there were no shadows? Shadows are cast by people and objects. The shadow from my sword, for instance. But shadows are also cast by trees and by living creatures. Would you strip the whole globe, denude it of all trees and all living things, to satisfy your fantasy of reveling in pure light? You’re foolish.” Said by Woland in Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*. There’s a second quote that fits perfectly with the first: “You must make good out of evil, because there’s nothing else out of which to make it.” Come to think of it, any solution to the tragic situation we’re now in will be perceived by some people as evil. But something has to be done, and it will have to be done if not now, then later, at which point we

will have to deal with the disastrous consequences of majority neutrality.

11. Books by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. The bright beautiful world they describe is worth building, if not for yourself, then at least for posterity.

12. I find it hard to answer this question. We should follow in the footsteps of all investigators, scientists, pioneers, exploring the new and thus dispelling the darkness.

13. To me, "Russia today" is something that will cease to exist one way or another. Playing on imperial ambitions, militarism, and hatred of one's neighbors won't work for long. I hope people are tired of war. An empire is not a viable structure of state organization. If we mean to develop, we must abandon those ancient vestiges, the maniacal desire to drag Russia back into the archaic past. *Change* is inherent in the evolution of living things, yet we are being asked to harden ourselves, to promote an antediluvian dogmatism, to embrace obsolete traditions from the ancient past, and to impose barbarism and fanaticism. German society has developed an immunity to fascism and a certain sense of shame about its past.

We too will have to go through that. A feeling of guilt, like that of the cat that has made a mess in the living room, is vital to us. Our nation has been indoctrinated for too long in the “rightness” of what is happening and in Russia’s special path.

Moreover, I assume that in the future there will be no borders as such and no states. Man, as a citizen of the world, is an inhabitant of planet Earth. Free from dogmas, stereotypes, playfully exploring the world around him, which is not limited to the planet.

Dmitry Nikolayevich TALANTOV (b. 1960)



Lived in Izhevsk, capital of the Udmurt Republic. Noted human rights lawyer; ex-president of the Udmurtia Bar Association. He became a defense attorney for Ivan Safronov (p. 300) in August 2021, after a criminal case was brought against Safronov’s previous lawyer, Ivan Pavlov. The morning of June 28, 2022, Dmitry Talantov was at his sunny dacha, washing the dishes and listening to jazz:

“That’s why I didn’t even hear the cars pull up,” he told the Udmurtia Bar. “Suddenly, from behind me: ‘Dmitry Nikolayevich Talantov!’ I turned around: men in camouflage and masks... Handcuffs floating towards me. I’ll remember all this for the rest of my life.” Talantov was arrested and sent to Moscow that day on charges of “disseminating knowingly false information about the Russian Armed Forces on grounds of political hatred” (Article 207.3 of the Russian Criminal Code, punishable by up to 10 years in prison). In September 2022, Talantov was additionally charged with “incitement to hatred or enmity using one’s official position” (Article 282). On December 27, 2022, he was sent back to Izhevsk ahead of his trial.

The case against Talantov is based on a Facebook post from April 3, 2022, in which he re-posted a photograph of an elderly man on Red Square holding a placard that said: “For Ukraine—peace. For Russia—sanity, horror, shame, repentance. For Putin—hell.” Next to this photo, Talantov had written:

“How could it be otherwise after the photographs and videos from Kharkiv, Mariupol, Irpin, and Bucha??? This is no longer simply fascism—these are extreme Nazi practices! If, after this, most of my compatriots support the murderer Putin and his gang, I personally refuse to recognize them as human beings. Human beings have the quality of compassion. Whereas these are just stupid evil scum.”

Some people feel that, as a lawyer, Talantov should have known that his post could be perceived as a violation of the new laws. “‘Could be perceived’? I don’t give a damn about ‘perception’,” he told the Udmurtia Bar. “I knew and I know that there is no crime in my post. And I’m not a rat who thinks only about how not to be framed. I once looked at a photograph of a mutilated Ukrainian girl and decided I couldn’t keep quiet anymore.”

1. I’m someone who asks himself that question all the time.
2. Despite everything, I believe in human beings.
3. I try not to act impulsively. Sometimes I succeed.
4. To preserve yourself.
5. Love. It always arrives on time.
6. A lack of decency and compassion in people.
7. See question No. 6.
8. Respect for the other person.
9. Music.

10. “We’ve already won. It’s just not that noticeable yet.” (Boris Grebenshchikov)

11. *Joseph and His Brothers*. (Thomas Mann).

12. I’m afraid of this question. Not everyone is capable of self-sacrifice.

13. Today it’s pain. Only pain.

Vitaly Viktorovich TOROCHKOV (b. 1984)



Lived in the city of Cherepovets in the Vologda Region. Father of five children with his common-law wife: four of the five were taken away by social services in 2020, the fifth in 2021. After Russia invaded Ukraine, the couple published pro-Ukrainian, anti-war, and anti-Putin posts; also Ukrainian songs and links to Navalny. On September 28, 2022, Torochkov and his wife, Polina Roots, were detained

on charges of “inciting terrorist activity” (Article 205.2 of the Russian Criminal Code). The case against them was based on a video Torochkov posted on February 22, 2022, on VKontakte and on a Telegram channel he administered. The video was entitled: “A Russian Passport is a Disgrace and a Stigma!” It contained a clip of a young man burning his Russian passport and saying, among other things, “Death to Putin.” (The video was taken down four days later.)

Polina Roots has been sentenced to nine years in prison. Her husband, Vitaly Torochkov, has been sentenced to 13 years in a strict-regime penal colony.

Hello, Grigory! With great respect for you and for those who are with you in spirit, Vitaly!

I would like to thank you first off for your letter, your support and your efforts, as well as for your compassion and principles.

I want to try to answer your questions, but to be

honest, I don't completely understand them and I won't be able to answer them fully because of being in prison. Such answers may contain a lot of information that is of interest not only to you and ordinary people. But still I will try to write something in the way of answers.

1. I have never defined myself in anything and I have always disliked being forced to define myself in something, as everything in nature changes, so a person changes in his life, and one can define oneself only for a while, and, in my opinion, there can be no concreteness here. Man is learning and changing all his life, just like everything around him. I am just a simple person who has his own opinion about everything, who wants to be free, in harmony with nature and the surrounding world, who lives for peace, goodness and the development of everything good for mankind and all living things on Earth. I haven't found anything special or amazing in myself. I haven't noticed any great talents in anything. I don't aspire to fame. I don't aspire to politics either. But since 2013, I've been forced to take an interest in politics and I may have to become involved in something of the sort, out of necessity. I've always been drawn to business, to a

family (a large one). The life of a farmer attracted me. But while pursuing and building all of this, I collided with Russia's criminal system, which I've had to fight against since 2013 until today, as I realized that there was no other way. It is impossible to support parasite-criminals since you end up destroying yourself with your own hands, and especially as my problem had to do with the fate of my children, who were kidnapped for the purpose of their realization. Later, children in Ukraine were also kidnapped, according to the same scheme. That's why my wife and I were packed off to prison, primarily because of the children, and my fighting against the criminal system of the Russian Federation. We are living witnesses of these crimes against children, of this covert, criminal business in Russia and elsewhere. We have knocked on every door we could find in the world. In Russia these are not just criminals, they are animals that should be kept in zoo cages for study, not in the halls of power, in offices of the FSB, Ministry of Internal Affairs, public prosecutors and courts.

2. I believe in a future full of good people, not animals in human form. Everything will have been resolved and all of the Russian Federation's problems will have become history, a history that people will study for a long time to come, and very carefully.

3. I always rely on my reason based on the facts, but in matters of debate I may also pay attention to my gut feeling.

4. The most important thing for a person, it seems to me, is that person's life in harmony with nature and the world—the purpose for which life is given.

5. I have a lot of things to be happy about, but without a normal life at the moment, all those joys are insignificant. When peace and better times come, I'll be happy, but for now I can only wish and strive.

6. What deeply saddens me in life is betrayal, lies, etc.

7. Everything that is connected with genocide and destruction.

8. Everything that is connected with human life.

9. Interesting and mysterious paintings, though I don't not know much about art.

10. A quote from a movie, "And everyone in this life will be repaid for everything."

11. All the books I've read are important to me. There aren't many of them. I have to have a good reason to read.

12. There are many such people, but all of them are role models only in part. A person should always take

something good and needed from others, should learn from ideals.

13. Russia today is a great calamity for everyone. We must stop this calamity and solve all our problems. Not as always, but for always.

With best regards,

Vitaly

Andrei Nikolayevich TROFIMOV (b. 1966)



Lived in the city of Konakovo, in the Tver Region. Graduated from Bauman Moscow State Technical University. Veteran of the protest movement: Trofimov defended the Russian White House during the August coup in 1991. On May 7, 2022, FSB officers detained him on charges of “calling for extremist activity” (Article 280 of the Russian Criminal Code). In December 2022, he was additionally charged

with “discrediting the Russian Armed Forces” (Article 207.3). And in March 2023, Trofimov was charged under Article 208 with attempting to join the Freedom of Russia Legion, a Ukraine-based paramilitary unit.

Ahead of his sentencing, Trofimov told the court: “Ukraine is a victim of Russian aggression. As for me, I demand the maximum sentence, because I despise you. Walk the same ground with you and live in the same state, I will not.”

On October 18, 2023, Andrei Trofimov was sentenced to 10 years in a strict-regime penal colony

First (as in the record of any interrogation), time and place. The fourth half-year of the war, the sixteenth month of prison; solitary cell in Detention Center-1, city of Tver.

1. I’m actually a traveler. Ever since my geologist parents started dragging me “into the field” as a small child, I’ve been unable to stop. With school buddies and my

physics teacher on bicycles. With a university friend, and then with my wife in a canoe. With my sons in a white Zaporozhets [cheap Soviet car made in Ukraine]. Again with my wife on trains, by plane, again in a canoe and again on bicycles. Now I'm alone, but look where! Here and now, I'm on the FSIN [Federal Penitentiary Service] Archipelago. I'm a political prisoner. It's a sort of job: to be a walking compendium of meanings. I contain fearlessness, both behavioral and intellectual. [Actress Liya] Akhedzhakova put it beautifully: "Guys, don't keep quiet. We're all gonna die anyway!"

The other part of the political prisoner's job was shown in the movie "To Kill the Dragon" [1988]. Lancelot receives a message from his comrades-in-arms in prison: they ask him to change his name. Instead, he comes out of hiding, takes up his sword and destroys everything.

Political prisoners motivate those on the outside.

2. The future has no variants, there's only one. Free will is an illusion, a defect in human consciousness.

3. Only on my gut feeling. That is how I made the major decisions in my life: in October 1991, I proposed to my future wife, and in February 2022, I volunteered for the war.

4. The instinct for self-preservation. I'm not kidding. For as long as I can remember, I've been trying to preserve myself and not bow down to circumstances. I mean preserving my individuality, of course, not the integrity of my corporeal shell. So adventures are all to the good.

5. The achievements of children. Not only of my own, but of all those children in whose lives I participated. I used to teach in an orphanage. With a bit of coaching from me, two orphans from the Kaluga Region—a boy and a girl—were accepted to universities in Moscow. Having grown up long ago, they live in Moscow and work in their chosen professions. Among the pictures on the wall of my cell is a child in a canoe in the middle of a beautiful lake. This is my nephew, now five years old. When he was two years old, it was I who first buckled him into his life jacket and settled him in the canoe (my brother and I have similar pedagogical methods). And it was I who chose my nephew's first bicycle helmet. But the principal joy, of course, comes from my own children. Another photo on the wall: my eldest son with a fresh red diploma (excellent university, full scholarship). Next to it is a portrait of my youngest, about whom I have not known anything for 16 months. I hope to

receive all his news in bulk. He too is capable of bringing me happy surprises... Oh stop me already, someone. :)

6. The death of my Motherland. I remember very well December 1991, when we buried the USSR. The Soviet Union died a natural death (old age has no cure), but it was still very sad, and at the funeral there were many good things to be said about the deceased. I will mourn Russia too (but her death will be terrible).

7. Lies.

8. The greatest benefit to man is travel. To mankind, flights into space (the beginning of travel for all mankind).

9. Poetry. I realized this only in prison, but quickly and clearly. I started my prison journey in solitary confinement. There are no TV sets in solitary confinement, but I didn't miss the movies. As it turned out, I could also do without books. But my favorite poems were so necessary that I wrote them out from memory on sheets of paper and decorated the walls of my cell with them (I didn't yet have any family photos). Poetry is an art form that does not require a material medium, but lives entirely in your head. Rarely can someone remember their favorite prose by heart, or draw a favorite picture from memory, or play a nocturne on their local window-grating flute. But to recite,

write out, or sing your favorite poems—easy as pie! My stock turned out to be quite large. First of all, my thanks to Zinaida Nikolayevna Kulakova from Moscow School No. 201, who made us learn a lot by heart. From my school stock, Pushkin has come in handy in prison (“I Still Recall the Wondrous Moment”—I copied out that poem for my cellmate when he was composing a birthday greeting for his wife). Also Mayakovsky (especially during my hunger strike when I was about to “reincarnate as steamboats, as lines of writing, and other enduring things”). Secondly, my thanks to my mother, who instilled in me a love of bards’ songs.

I’ve even “disseminated” Vysotsky’s early “outlaw songs” here. I gave them to some gangsters I knew in another cell to raise their general cultural level. On walks I’ve sung Okudzhava and Vizbor. And I had Galich (“And still the same, not simpler, our time is trying us...”) on a wall in my cell. Oy, here I go again! Stop me!

10. For years it was: “If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans.” (I’m an atheist, but this holds true for atheists too). Since February 24, 2022, it has been the explicit order: “Do what you must, and come what may!”

11. The most important book is the one that has changed your life. I have only one such book: where Akunin has Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*, I have Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island*. It is a hymn to human intelligence, friendship, peaceful labor, and the possibility, with the help of all this, of remaking the world. In elementary school, I fell in love with Cyrus Smith. I decided that I too would become an engineer, and lived in that paradigm for a decade and a half.

12. I have lots of role models. For example: Afanasy Nikitin, [the 15th century traveler from Tver]. He too liked to sail down the Volga on a longship. To him, it was important not just to be the first European to reach India, but also to write a book about it. Nikolai Kibalchich, [the 19th century Russian revolutionary], was also held in solitary confinement; there he thought not about his impending execution, but about the possibility of human flight on a rocket. [Russian and Soviet rocket scientist] Konstantin Tsiolkovsky also taught school in the Kaluga province (where, like me, he tried to teach silly girls math) and published strange texts for no royalties. His idea was that man, having penetrated the cosmos, would change biologically (so as to be able to live there, and not just visit)—and this would be more important than his rocket equation.

13. Today, Russia is my prison, also the homeland of Putin, my investigators, judges and guards. If and when I get out of here, my first personal task will be to get the people I care about out of here. See also my answer to question No. 6.

Nikita Alexeyevich TUSHKANOV (b. 1994)



Lived in the northwestern city of Syktyvkar. A schoolteacher, he was fired in March 2021 for staging a one-man picket in support of Alexei Navalny. On December 7, 2022, Nikita Tushkanov was detained on charges of “justifying terrorism” (Article 205.2 of the Russian Criminal Code) and “discrediting the Russian Armed Forces” (Art. 280.3). On May 11, 2023, he was sentenced to 5.5 years in prison for

comments he posted on the social network VKontakte. He called the October 2022 bombing of the Crimean Bridge “a birthday present for Putler.” He called Russia’s response (rocket strikes on Ukrainian cities) “the revenge of Putin’s fascism.”

Ahead of his sentencing, Tushkanov told the court: “The Anschluss [Nazi Germany’s annexation] of Austria took place in the same way as Russia’s ‘reunification’ with Crimea. Russia unleashed a war in Ukraine in 2014, and in February 2022 it unleashed a full-scale war led by Putin... condemning tens of thousands of people to death and millions more to suffering... In the name of what?”

1. I’m a history teacher who was born and lived for a long time in a village. I have the characteristics of both a peasant and a city dweller. Like in the song by Boris Grebenshchikov: “But if I could choose myself, I would become myself again.”

2. I believe in law, order and love (although love may be illogical here). My belief in these things made me a member of the opposition, because those people who fill positions in all sorts of offices act like an organized crime group. But worst of all, they forbid (try to forbid) people to love each other in the broadest sense of the word, fostering hatred in them.

3. The most important decisions I make are most likely because I feel it's necessary, urgent to do so. Only then does my mind engage so as to reflect or achieve the goal. But I wound up here [in prison] consciously. I knew it would happen sooner or later, but I did what I had to do.

4. The most important thing in life is life itself. And this is not just about a particular person, but about everything in existence.

5. My greatest joy comes from the fact that I can bring happiness to people, and not only to my loved ones. Yes, realizing and feeling that my wife and mother need me elates me, of course, but working in a school, that feeling is even broader. When you see in the eyes of the children and their parents their gratitude for what you do, it makes you happy.

6. What saddens me most is that justice is not always done before a person dies. As for me personally, it's my laziness. I'm the only one in my family with such terrible handwriting. Then again, laziness is the mother of invention. Without it, there would be no progress. So I'm of two minds.

7. The greatest evil to man and mankind is and always has been the *system*, i.e. the state. I believe that years from now humanity will learn to live without it. It is the systems that unleash wars of "all good people against all bad ones." A handful of people spending money the way they want. They build aircraft carriers, and then ask for money for children's health care. People don't need aircraft carriers, they need good medicine, education, etc. Any state is violence, but with different levels of strength and sophistication.

8. The greatest benefit is brought by our capacity for empathy and for accumulating knowledge, for passing on experience. We are steadily striving and moving towards humanization, not only of humans, but also of animals, the Earth, and ecology. Knowledge rules! :)

9. Cinema has the strongest effect on a person. It is a symbiosis of all forms of art. And mass culture is becoming more and more complex, which suggests the growth of mass consciousness, which is very gratifying. But music most of all, in terms of penetration and accessibility.

10. My rule is the maxim: Don't tell me how to do this or that, but do it yourself and be an example to others. And, of course, Kant's golden imperative is my favorite quote. (There's not enough space to write it here.) [See Navalny, No. 10, pp. 252-3.]

11. Book: Viktor Remizov's *Permafrost* (Vechnaya merzlota). I recommend it. No book has evoked such emotions in me as this one.

12. Alexei Anatolievich Navalny is without doubt a role model, but Andrei Sakharov, the academician who defied the USSR, commands my respect even more. My father was (and is) an example to me. He died in 2019, he was an honorable man, and I want to be better than him.

13. Today, to me, Russia is people. Like millions of people, I was forced out of my country, turned into an emigrant, yet I haven't gone anywhere. It's like in that song by the punk group Pornofilm: "My Russia is sitting in prison..." In this emigration we've found something

more than a country, we've found a homeland. (At least I have.) That part which instils hope for a rebirth. But as a country, I consider that Russia has been invaded, or at least gripped, by delusions of fascism. We are, as Yuri Shevchuk put it, "captives in our own land." But we will break out of this captivity. And once we've won our Freedom, we won't give it back so easily.

With best regards,

Nikita Alexeyevich

History teacher

Detention Center No. 1

Syktyvkar

Ruslan Vyacheslavovich USHAKOV (b. 1993)



Lived in Moscow. Vegan; anarchist; creator of the Telegram channel “True Crime”. Detained in December 2022. Convicted in June 2023 of “discrediting the Russian Army” (Article 207.3 of the Russian Criminal Code), “rehabilitating Nazism” (Article 354.1), “justifying terrorism” (Article 205.2), and “inciting hatred” (Article 282). According to OVD-Info, the case against Ushakov was based on “True Crime” posts in which he referred to the shelling of Mariupol and the killing of civilians in Ukraine. He also called for violence against Vladimir Putin. Ruslan

Ushakov told the court that he had been tortured with electric shocks while under interrogation. He immediately confessed to one article to get the torture to stop—but it continued. He also said that he “never endorsed Nazism or terrorism and never intended to incite political hatred.” The sole aim of his channel was “to draw people’s attention to events.”

On June 28, 2023, Ruslan Ushakov was sentenced to eight years in a general-regime penal colony. On October 27, 2023, on appeal, his sentence was reduced by two months.

1. I’m a vegan activist, political prisoner, musician, criminologist and designer.
2. I believe in the incredible power of science.

3. I rely on reason, and that's probably why I'm in prison now. I had a hunch before I was arrested, but I chalked it up to paranoia.

4. The most important thing in life is to develop knowledge, culture and sports—for yourself and others.

5. Animal rescue; helping orphans; romance; dancing; substances; travel; freedom.

6. Prison; repressions; victim-blaming; regimes where the police and army have total control (fascism); war; starvation; racism; disinformation; indifference; revenge.

7. Selfishness and the human ego.

8. Science; especially popular science; freedom from the state.

9. Music and painting.

10. “Better a day like a lion than a year like a sheep.”

11. *LSD: My Problem Child* by Albert Hofmann.

12. Hunter Thompson.

13. A threat to world culture and security.

Natalia Ivanovna FILONOVA (b. 1961)



Lived in the Siberian city of Ulan-Ude. Journalist for a local newspaper till the censorship became unbearable. Began publishing her own newspaper Against All Odds. In January 2021, she was fined for protesting in support of Alexei Navalny. In May 2022, she spent five days in jail on charges of petty hooliganism: she had insisted that the militarist Z on a city bus be removed. On September 24, 2022,

she was detained at a live stream on Ulan-Ude's Theater Square: she was asking passers-by how they felt about the "partial" mobilization for the war in Ukraine. After 48 hours in detention, four police officers forced her into a car and refused to say where they were taking her. In her hearing, they had been given orders to "deal with her." Filonova tried to break free and a scuffle ensued. In hindsight, she believes the police frightened her on purpose—so that she would react the way she did and her administrative offense could be converted into a criminal one. She was later convicted of "assaulting" two police officers (Article 318 of the Russian Criminal Code) and sentenced to two years and 10 months in a penal colony.

Filonova's special-needs adoptive son, Vladimir Alalykin, was taken away and sent to a remote orphanage.

Hello, dear Grigory Shalvovich! Despite the contra-

diction in your letter, I understand you. You asked yourself the question: how could you change the attitude of Russian society towards political prisoners. At the same time, you developed a questionnaire with worldview questions, not for that society which shies away from political and civil problems, but for those whom, in your opinion, that very society rejects.

Most likely, this survey will help society to see the depth of the abyss that divides people. Perhaps it will suggest ways to unite, consolidate, or at least understand. Perhaps it will make the brainwashed majority show some kind of civil respect for dissent so as to shed their blinders and free themselves of imposed ideals.

Of course, you can't wake a person up and get them to change their mind overnight, but you can plant the seed of doubt, which cannot help but grow under the influence of life itself, God willing. [Putin's] power vertical also understands the danger of enlightening the masses and that's why, while tightening the screws and toughening the laws, it has introduced "Important Conversations" [compulsory lessons in "patriotism"] in schools to the detriment of core subjects; that's why it is publishing new textbooks, imprisoning educators; driving a wedge between people; and discrediting the very idea of free speech and writing.

[Putin's regime] has an important mission: to retain power, while turning society into a herd of obedient sheep. Society's job is to shake off this fog. People are generally not bad: they're kind, decent, ready to help each other, but the vector is reset at some point, and all those qualities, without disappearing, start working in a different direction. Some people have embraced rah-rah patriotism and can't break out of that rut; others have simply withdrawn into themselves, betting on survival; still others, protesting consciously or unconsciously, plunge into the criminal environment and get stuck there. But our society, having long been on the brink of totalitarianism, must be made to realize the danger of destroying all civil rights. And the more people there are who, "despite all the risks and consequences" (as you put it), try to change the situation, the more likely it is that the entire society will recover.

This way of thinking is, of course, common to many people. That means we have potential. I believe this, I hope so, even based on my personal experience of working with people as a correspondent for a district newspaper and then as the founder, publisher, editor and eternal correspondent

of my own small newspaper *Against All Odds*. It appeared from 2004 to 2016.

AUTO-GRAPH

1. A protester with the tendencies of a Mother Teresa. I remember myself as a little girl of five, with bangs cut short and a stubborn look, beside my young and happy parents and my little disabled brother, whom I adored and pitied, and later carried piggyback to the movies. Since then, I've considered it my duty to help people, I've insisted on it. I have criticized my superiors without considering the consequences. Instead, my actions have always been guided by my conscience, by my views of life, and by fairness. After eighth grade, I decided to save agriculture in the Chita region (now Trans-Baikalia). I enrolled in the Nerchinsk State Farming Technical School. Even though I was a good student and showed promise, I was expelled after I organized a group against the directorate for treating students unfairly. I was only 15... Today, more than 45 years later, my inner feelings haven't changed...

2. I believe in people. I believe that words can change the world. There's a formula derived by Yuri Voronov, a poet who survived the Siege of Leningrad—it helped me just when I had to change careers. I went from working with farm animals to working with small children. There were people who believed in me. But Voronov's poems saved my life. When I read the line “Well, it depends on you, then, which way the scales tip,” my fellow travelers had to make a choice in favor of the good....

3. Important decisions make themselves, sometimes preceded by “agonizing doubts”, but those doubt do not prevent me from acting on my gut feeling. Reason is always the loser...

4. People from the planet Earth. Would that they, as in Yesenin, “Beasts, as our lesser brothers, never beat.”

5. The joy of talking to good people; the joy of a bonfire burning in the dark; of the chance to go for a dip in the river; of clouds scudding across the sky....

6. It's saddening to feel a dislike for someone or something; it's saddening not to be able to step in and do what your conscience tells you to do...

7. Opportunism is most likely human nature. While helping a person to survive, it desiccates their soul and makes them more cynical.

8. Openness, the desire to join forces regardless of party affiliation, religion, or nationality. That was the slogan we proclaimed for almost two years here in the Republic of Buryatia, standing at the OM (Open Microphone) on Ulan-Ude's main square, Soviets' Square. Our naivety—the joy of communicating, arguing till our voices were hoarse, the desire among people of different ages, opinions, and experience to change the world—was like a little spark against a backdrop of gathering clouds. A little more pressure, and we could have parted those clouds with our hands.

9. Architecture, old buildings. Theater and movies, too.

10. My [favorite] quote is in Robert Burns, his diary, when he's musing on man, on his essence: he sparkingly believes in people and forgives them everything.

11. *In the Depths of Siberian Ores* by Arnold Gessen and *Peter's Casemate* by Valentina Trukhina.

12. There are many such people. First of all, the Decembrists. And among the recently departed, my friend, the children's poet Irina Molchanova (Fyodorova), who wrote under the pseudonym Iya Molchanova. Her lyrics, her life, and the sufferings she endured make an impression...

13. Russia must get over its enchantment, shake off the spell that has been cast, and return to the roots of morality. Russia does not realize that it has lost its way; it ignores the brutality that has proliferated and the destruction of civil rights. Not out of spite, but out of some habit of tolerating, of keeping quiet, and of bearing misfortune and sorrow. There's a lack of joy, of openness, of an awareness of the importance of action and movement. Russia should not be a huge prison. We need change—the winds of change of Gorbachev's perestroika and free elections! And faith in people. As we used to sing: “Faith in people, faith in people is our main weapon!”

Valentin Alexeyevich KHOROSHENIN (b. 2001)



Lived in St. Petersburg. Regional coordinator of Vesna (Spring), a democratic youth movement “to build a new Russia based on freedom and human rights.” Founded in 2013, Vesna began organizing anti-war protests across Russia after Putin’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In early May 2022, Valentin Khoroshenin and fellow Vesna coordinator Evgeny Zateyev were detained on charges

of “creating an NGO that infringes on the person and rights of citizens” (Article 239 of the Russian Criminal Code). Vesna had announced an action for Victory Day, on May 9, called “This is Not What They Fought For.”

For over a year Khoroshenin and Zateyev lived under certain court-ordered restrictions. During that year Vesna was declared a “foreign agent” (October 2022) and then an “extremist” organization (December 2022).

On June 6, 2023, a second criminal case was opened against them. Khoroshenin and Zateyev were detained along with four other alleged members of Vesna (Yan Ksenzhepolskiy, Anna Arkhipova, Pavel Sinelnikov and Vasily Neustroyev). All six were transferred to pre-trial detention in Moscow.

Khoroshenin and Zateyev have now been charged with “creating an extremist community” (Article 282.1, punishable by up to 10 years in prison) and “disseminating disrespectful information

about memorable dates associated with Russia’s defense of the Fatherland” (Article 354.1, punishable by up to five years in prison). On February 15, 2024, the Moscow City Court extended their pre-trial detention by another three months.

1. Given the availability of only two sheets, I will allow myself to answer in less detail than I would have liked, confining myself to labels plus a brief explanation. I am a Christian; the Gospel and the Social Teachings of the Roman Catholic Church have strongly influenced my worldview. I am a family man. I stand up for those near and dear to me, I respect my parents and intend to start a family with my beloved fiancée. I am a citizen, who loves his country and distinguishes between the concepts of “Fatherland” and “Your Majesty”. I am an educator, immodest as that may sound, but in St. Petersburg I was actively engaged in popularizing the scientific humanities. I’m still convinced that change will come from the attitudinal changes in citizens, and not otherwise.

2. I believe in God and in the divine gift of love.

3. I prefer to balance and consider each matter holistically, but if I have to choose, I will choose my gut feeling, because reason with its accompanying cold rationalism often goes against conscience.

4. Family: the happiness and health of my loved ones.
5. Calm and peaceful time spent with my family and friends; learning new things; unity in prayer with brothers and sisters in Christ.
6. Injustice. Every person should receive both rewards and punishments solely according to his deeds.
7. Selfishness. This spawn of hubris drives people to act in ways that are essentially evil and sinful.
8. I mentioned love earlier, but here it is solidarity. Compassion for others and sharing burdens is good for the world. It's no wonder that the most successful societies demonstrate high levels of trust.
9. Music. It most accurately conveys feelings and emotions and, if there's a video sequence, images too.
10. "We all live under the same sky, but we don't all have the same horizon," as Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, said. Despite our different views, we are all human beings, if not fellow citizens, and should be open to dialogue.
11. The New Testament.

12. I do not have role models. I do not create idols for myself. There are lessons to be learned from everyone's life.

13. Russia is my Motherland, which I love and sincerely wish the best. My Motherland has strayed from the path of humanism, democracy and modernization; this is due not to cultural determinism, but to political will. Despite this, my Motherland is still my Motherland.

Karina Valeryevna TSURKAN (b. 1974)



Lawyer. Born and educated in Moldova. In 2005, began working for the Russian energy company Inter RAO in its Chisinau office. In 2007, Karina Tsurkan moved to Moscow for a job in the main office. Renounced her Moldovan citizenship to become a Russian citizen in 2016. By the time of her arrest, in June 2018, she was a top manager and very well paid. The FSB charged her with “espionage”

(Article 276 of the Russian Criminal Code). They alleged that in 2015, while still a Moldovan citizen, Tsurkan had passed classified information (about the supply of electricity to Ukraine, including Russian-occupied parts of Donbass) to Moldovan intelligence, which then passed it to NATO intelligence. Tsurkan, who had no access to classified information, refused to enter into a plea deal. The Memorial Human Rights Center has recognized her as a political prisoner. Her 73-year-old mother was left to look after her 14-year-old son.

On December 29, 2020, Karina Tsurkan was sentenced to 15 years in a general-regime penal colony.

In this letter I will answer the questions of the deeply-respected-by-me G. Chkhartishvili in his AUTO-GRAPH. I remember his conversation with Dmitry Bykov in 2016

or 2017 on Public Talk (*Pryamaya Rech*). If you haven't listened to it, I recommend it. Their talk is a case of when 1+1 equals not 2, but 100. Two intellects, feeding off each other, draw the entire audience into that dazzling display.

Well, now for my answers.

1. I will skip the first question, as it makes me feel a bit awkward. I can only say that with every passing day, every passing year (including the last five in prison), I'm more and more interested in and curious about life.

2. In God. And in the unconditional love of loved ones.

3. I skillfully adjust seemingly sound reasons to fit the inner feeling that determines everything.

4. This may sound pompous, but I can't put it another way: every day of life should not be a loss to one's spiritual growth. I naturally fail in this mission on a daily basis.

5. Solitude with a book, a cup of coffee, and a dog cozily asleep beside me. :)

6. My own imperfections, which are countless.

7. Lovelessness, in all its manifestations. And fear. The only thing worth being afraid of is fear. Fear of exposing one's weakness to others, one's vulnerability, gives rise to aggression. Between individuals and between nations.

8. The ability to feel part of the whole, the One. And a sense of humor.

9. Whatever one's personal preferences (I like graphics, for example), it seems to me that music has the most powerful effect on everyone. It pierces, penetrates through all the layers, the layers of our defenses, without asking and almost without requiring our participation.

10. I guess so. A few years ago I borrowed a book by Eugene Vodolazkin: *Idi bestrepetno* (Go Dauntlessly). That title fit very harmoniously into the fascinating circumstances offered me by God's Providence.

11. Oh no, I'll skip this question. Otherwise I'll use up all the sheets I have on this topic. :) There is no one such book.

12. No. I tend to fall in love with the images of striking, unusual people who live by their convictions. But everyone has their own path and their own challenges.

13. Russia is my cultural and spiritual space, the light within any darkness.

Thank you for this excuse to reflect amid the hectic rush of regimented activities!

Karina

Alexander Vyacheslavovich SHESTUN (b. 1964)



Elected head of the Serpukhov district (2003-2018) in the Moscow Region. Married; father of five. A key witness in the 2011 case brought against Moscow Region prosecutors involved in covering up underground casinos. In April 2018, Shestun objected to further waste shipments from Moscow to the already over-capacity Lesnaya dump; he also granted permits to Serpukhov residents for protests

against local landfills that spewed hydrogen sulfide into the air. That same month Shestun posted a 17-minute video address to Vladimir Putin denouncing the pressure being put on him to resign and abandon plans to run for re-election that fall. The address included Shestun's audio recording of a meeting he had had with Mikhail Kuznetsov (head of the Moscow Region governor's administration), Andrei Yarin (head of the presidential administration's domestic policy) and FSB general Ivan Tkachev. Shestun was told that if he did not sign a letter of resignation there and then, his house would be taken away and a criminal case would be brought. Shestun: "I'm not ready to sign." Yarin: "You should have accepted my offer. You didn't. So we'll assume this conversation never took place. Okay? That's all, thank you. Goodbye."

On June 13, 2018, Alexander Shestun was arrested on charges of "abuse of office" (Article 289 of the Russian Criminal Code). This charge was later amended to include "fraud" (Article 159); "bribe-taking"

(Article 290); “money laundering” (Article 174.1); and “illegal participation in a business activity” (Article 289).

At a hearing on these various corruption charges in June 2019, Shestun told the court that he had been tortured and beaten, that he had been behind bars for a year without any evidence of guilt, that his family had been persecuted and deprived of their livelihood. He said that he had only one argument left—his life. With that, Shestun slit his wrist with a razor fragment. And was hospitalized.

The Memorial Human Rights Center holds that Shestun has been imprisoned for political reasons, to prevent him from taking part in local elections, and to punish him in a conspicuous way for having dared to make public the threats he received from senior government officials.

On December 21, 2020, Alexander Shestun was convicted on all four counts and sentenced to 15.5 years in a strict-regime penal colony. His family was evicted from their only home.

1. This is the hardest question. My daughter calls me a passionarian. It's true. I'm ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of justice and the betterment of Russia's welfare! I hate lies, cruelty, imperialism, [Russian chauvinists] and the morons who think they are the masters of life. Today at the hospital in Tver, where I was taken for a consultation, I objected to the [militarist] “Z” on the doors, and to all the money being spent on armaments instead of on hospitals—and was almost torn to pieces by some elderly women! Good thing my escort was armed! :)

2. I believe in reason, in democracy, in Christ, in libertarianism, in pragmatism. I am half businessman and half politician.

3. Unfortunately, I sometimes I rely on my gut feeling.

4. The main things in life are family, principles, honor...

5. Achieving results in the struggle for the Russia of the future; creativity (writing texts, music, photos, poems, design); the successes of my children and my mother's health; talking to interesting people; reading; sports.

6. The aggression of Russians!!! Their unwillingness to become prosperous and healthy! Their betrayal of the people around them. The world community's overly calm attitude towards the fighting in Ukraine.

7. Aggression; greed; dictatorial regimes.

8. The development of science, culture, technology, pacifism, security, democracy.

9. I'm in a punishment cell (SHIZO) with a fold-away bunk, without a TV. Books are No. 1. Music is No. 2. Ballet and dancing are No. 3.

10. "The prison makes the prisoner what he is." Victor Hugo (I'm not vouching for the accuracy, I'm in a SHIZO without books). Very apropos for me now. I have huge volumes of quotations at home. My favorites number more than 100...

11. *Journey into the Whirlwind* (Eugenia Ginzburg); *Les Misérables* (Hugo); *Dr. Zhivago* (Pasternak); the Bible.

12. Boris Nemtsov; Andrei Sakharov; Mikhail Khodorkovsky; my grandfather Alexander Ivanovich Shestun.

13. It's no coincidence that this question is No. 13. Russia to me is enormous pain. A police state with a slave population. But there are some real heroes.

Yegor Olegovich SHTOVBA (b. 2000)



Muscovite. University student. Poet. On September 25, 2022, Shtovba attended the Mayakovsky Readings, a monthly meeting by Mayakovsky's monument in central Moscow. This particular meeting was billed as "against mobilization." (A "partial" mobilization for the war in Ukraine had been declared a few days before.) Forty minutes into the poetry reading, the police arrived and began de-

taining random participants, among them Yegor Shtovba. Initially accused of attending an "unauthorized rally," he was later convicted under Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code ("humiliation of a social group with the threat of violence over the Internet by an organized group") and Article 280.4 ("public calls for activities against the security of the state by an organized group").

On December 28, 2023, Yegor Shtovba was sentenced to 5.5 years in a general-regime penal colony.

Pleasantly shocked to receive a text from Boris Akunin. Of course, I will respond.

Hello, Grigory Shalvovich! Thank you very much for your support. I was incredibly glad to receive your letter. To explain the motives behind our actions—that sounds like the motivation for all my creative activity. I like the idea. Here are my responses to your questions.

1. Who am I? I would describe myself now as a creative person who wants to explore everything in the world.

2. What do I believe in? In humanism. That humans, in general, are a very undervalued species of living beings, and that they will show themselves to better effect. We will. (I guess I'm a human too).

3. What do I rely on when making decisions? Mostly on feelings. This often leads to mistakes, but that's how I live a full and interesting life. True, deliberation is a good thing, too. It would be good to learn to find a balance.

4. The most important thing in life is to be happy.

5. The everyday things that bring me the most joy are talking to people and listening to music. If you go deeper, then it's the realization of my creative projects.

6. The most saddening thing is that many people don't want to even try to understand another person. This makes for aggression, which in turn begets cruelty.

7. What brings the greatest evil to man and mankind? See my answer to question No. 6.

8. The greatest benefit? I'm pro-science. Science and education. By education I mean knowledge, not a diploma.

9. Which art form has the strongest effect on me? I don't know what to say. Any kind of art. I prefer poetry and music, but only because I find them easier to absorb.

10. I have many favorite quotes. I'll mention the one on my lucky Zippo lighter: "If you don't know what you're living for, you'll die surrounded by things you didn't want."

11. The most important book I've read is Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. This book has contributed a lot to the formation of my views and values. Incidentally, they say it's popular in prison.

12. Role models... There are no perfect people, but there are many people I want to emulate in some way, and I probably do. In the end, the real person is different from the image I have built up in my head.

13. Russia to me today is the same as it has always been. There's a difference between the government and

the people. I love Russia. I have a strong emotional attachment to home, but everything that is happening now makes me a hopeless pessimist. “No comment,” as the greats say.

Thank you again for your letter.

With best regards,

Yegor Shtovba
defendant in the Mayakovsky case

Alexei Sergeyevich YANOCHKIN (b. 1979)



Lived in Krasnoyarsk. Short order cook. Animal lover. Drafted into the Russian Army at the age of 19, Yanochkin spent nine months in Chechnya. “And now,” his fiancée Lyudmila told the Riga-based news site Meduza, “he’s accused of having allegedly gotten some special training there, so as to organize mass riots 20 years later. It’s just idiocy.” On the morning of September 16, 2021, Alexei was about to leave for

work. Lyudmila, then eight months pregnant, was drinking coffee with a friend when law enforcers burst in and spent the next five hours searching the apartment. Over the summer, said Lyudmila, someone had added Alexei to the “What Is to Be Done!” chat group on Telegram (67 members).

Yanochkin was detained and later charged under Article 212 of the Russian Criminal Code (“instigation of mass riots”) and Article 282 (“incitement to hatred by an organized group”). He is one of 11 defendants (see also Abramov, p. 95; Kurlov, p. 225; Nagibin, p. 255; and Sadriyev, p. 297) in the “What Is to Be Done!” case.

...Regarding me personally: I’m a veteran of combat operations (1999-2000). I did my required military service in Dagestan and Chechnya. I’m also a volunteer animal rights activist. I met my fiancée because of our shared love of animals. I was picking up a dog from the local shelter—it had been left outside a store. :(My love of good music added to my passion: my wife teaches vocals! She conducts

concerts with her small group, organizes them herself. I am a rocker, and an incorrigible one at that, I don't accept any other music, only Russian rock. I believe in God, or rather, I believe that everything is God's will and one should live according to God's laws. I seek out active and positive people, who still have a Soviet upbringing inside them. I believe that people now lack that very Russian culture since the influence of the West has had a very bad effect on our society. I want to draw the older generation's attention to how and what they can teach the younger generation. But that is another story! Be patient!

Ilya Valeryevich YASHIN (b. 1983)



Muscovite. Politician. Head of the Yabloko party's youth wing (2001-08); organized mass protests and spoke to the media. Co-founder with Boris Nemtsov of Russia's Solidarity movement in 2008. Member of the PARNAS party (2010-16). Head of a Moscow municipal district council (2017-21). Comrade of Alexei Navalny. Barred in June 2021 from running for re-election, after being deemed

an "extremist." In March 2022, Yashin publicly decried Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The evening of June 27, 2022, Yashin was walking in a park with a friend when he was detained. He was later convicted of "discrediting the Russian Army" (Article 207.3 of the Russian Criminal Code). On December 9, 2022, in his closing speech to the court, Ilya Yashin said: "I could have run away. I could have shut up. But I did what I had to do. Better to spend a decade behind bars, remaining an honest person, than to burn silently with shame at what is happening in your name."

Yashin was sentenced to 8.5 years in a general-regime penal colony.

1. I am a person who cares and is interested in life.
2. I believe in goodness, in progress and, of course, in people. People are complicated and full of contradictions. They are often wrong, sometimes disappointing. But at the same time, it is people who inspire me, give me strength and help me go forward. I love people.

3. The first thing that comes into play is my reason. I analyze and consider the various possible decisions, then choose the optimal one. But in the process of making my choice, an inner feeling can kick in. It's like an alarm that screams in your head that your decision may be logical, but it contradicts your values and beliefs, and is therefore unacceptable.

4. The main thing is freedom and justice. I believe that a person is born free. I believe that the task of the state and society is to help them realize their freedom in creativity, in entrepreneurship, in serving people, in their personal life. Creating and guaranteeing opportunities for everyone to realize themselves: that, in my understanding, is justice.

For me personally, it is extremely important to feel an inner freedom and to strive for justice.

5. Creativity in the broadest sense of the word. I love to create things and I love it when others create things, putting their soul into it. I'm not religious, but I like the idea that God created man in his own image. And who is

God? The Creator. Which means that our purpose must be to create—and to do it with pleasure.

6. Here I'd like to quote Vysotsky: "I don't like it when they shoot you in the back" and "I can't stand it when innocent people are beaten." Simply put, I'm saddened by meanness and injustice.

7. Selfishness. But here there's a fine line. Ambition, in my opinion, is a positive and useful quality. Ambitious people often push human civilization forward, often stand at the forefront of social transformations, scientific discoveries and creative achievements. However, ambition and selfishness can turn imperceptibly into self-centeredness and devour a person from the inside, simultaneously bringing pain and sorrow to others.

How can this be prevented? From childhood, a person must be instilled with the values of humanism, empathy and mercy. Then their ambitions will develop in the right direction.

But if those ambitions grow out of cynicism, expect disaster. No one has brought more misery to mankind than ambitious cynics.

8. Love. It's what holds everything in this world together. Love between mother and child, love between

man and woman, brotherly love, love in all its diversity forms the foundation on which all things stand. Atrocities and wars arise where there is a shortage of love.

Again, I'm not religious. But I also like very much the idea that God is love. That, I'm ready to believe.

9. Probably, first and foremost, cinema and literature. Good movies and books allow you to live several lives at once, imagining yourself in different incarnations and different eras—and that's exciting. But music too, of course, has a strong effect on me, heightening all kinds of feelings and emotions. Sometimes it's like magic.

10. “Be realistic. Demand the impossible.” That was one of the main slogans of the student protests in Paris in 1968. To me, there is beauty in those words, and an aesthetic, and a very profound meaning.

11. It's hard to single out one book. But if I have to choose just one, I'll choose *Hard to Be a God* by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. At one time it was very important for me to realize that a progressor—trying to change an obscurantist society from within—runs the risk of becoming an obscurantist himself without

even noticing it. This realization was not only philosophical, but also practical, because it saved me from major mistakes when I was tempted, out of noble intentions, to become a part of a hostile system.

12. My role model is Konrad Adenauer. He was a German politician, the mayor of Cologne. After the Nazis came to power in Germany, Adenauer did not join them, did not run away, and did not shut up. He protested openly and consistently. For example, during Hitler's visit to Cologne, Adenauer refused to meet him at the airport (as required by protocol) and forbade the display of swastika flags in the streets. Naturally, he was arrested by the Gestapo.

When the Nazi regime suffered military defeat and collapsed, Adenauer became the first leader of a democratic Germany and rebuilt his country from the ruins, laying the foundations of a free and just state.

I have great respect for the road traveled by Adenauer and feel a spiritual affinity with the man.

13. I think of present-day Russia as a person who is close to me, but also gravely ill. Obviously, when a person

is ill and in pain, it's hard to talk to them. They scream, they're hard to bear; they may become delirious; they may insult or even hit someone who is trying to help. But you can't abandon your loved ones when they are unwell. You have to be patient and not take offense and try to cure them. When the person recovers, they will thank you. And the Motherland, too, when she recovers, will embrace you with gratitude, and not "kick you with a boot."

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*Names are listed in *Russian* alphabetical order:

A, B, V, G, E, Zh, Z, I, K, L, M, N, O, P, R, S, T, U, F, Kh, Ts, Sh, Ya