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Traveling Companions

Friedrich Gorenstein

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Friedrich Gorenstein : *Traveling Companions* before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Traveling Companions*:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. **Great Book - One of the Best Russian Writers of the 20th Century** By Sabatai Zevi Highly recommend to anyone interested in Russian Literature of the 20th Century. The Author is an unusual personality in his own right and cannot be easily placed within a category of one sort or the other - Something between Shalom Aleichem and William Shakespeare.

A marvelously told story of the Ukraine, at once bitter and full of mirth. A passenger on a train overhears the life story of one Alexander Chubinet's: a story unreal and all too real, full of misery, laughter, and surprise. The author entertains with Chubinet's tale, holding forth on Russian churches, Stalin, sex in literature, and more.

From Publishers Weekly Born in Kiev and now an exile in Berlin, Gorenstein is a lethal satirist of Soviet life. This freewheeling, digressive narrative records a chance meeting on a train between Felix Zabrodsky, a Moscow writer (stand-in for the author himself) and an elderly cripple, Alexander Chubinet, who tells of his shattered dreams as a peasant playwright, of the Nazi occupation of the Ukraine and of seven years in Arctic labor camps. Imprisoned on charges of "Ukrainian nationalism" for a play he wrote, Chubinet was released in 1957 but was banned from working in big cities. He ended up working as an assistant stage manager in small towns across Russia. Gorenstein punctuates

his seemingly casual tale with digressions on the perils of ideology, Ukrainian anti-Semitism, sex in literature, his dislike of Russians and much else. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal In the dark sleeping car of a Ukrainian train, Felix Zabrodsky forgoes his usual nap to listen to the life story of a traveling companion, Sasha Chubinets. Sasha is a would-be playwright who lived through the German invasion of the Ukraine and subsequent slaughter of Ukrainians, starvation, cannibalism, and both German and Russian prison camps. His story is punctuated by Zabrodsky's observations on everyday Ukrainian life: the value of salted pork fat, the superiority of country well water, and the petty tyranny of Berdichev train conductors. The juxtaposition of Zabrodsky's digressions and Sasha's life story enhances our appreciation of both. Because of the frequent cultural and historical references, this work will be best appreciated by readers who have some familiarity with Russian culture. Recommended.- Ruth M. Ross, Olympic Coll. Lib., Bremerton, Wash. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus sDevastating grim-wit about Alexander Chubinets, whom Soviet humorist Felix Zabrodsky--himself made up by Soviet ,migr, Gorenstein--makes up to accompany him on an overnight trip on the mail train from Kiev to Zdolbunov. Chubinets, a crippled minor playwright in the manner of a true Dostoevskian/Tolstoyan storyteller, fixes Zabrodsky with a shadowy eye and keeps him up all night with his horrendous life story and its wasteland of tragedies. Chubinets is from the Ukrainian village of Chubintsy, where half the folk, even those without blood ties, are named Chubinets. Chubinets has had a childhood of relentless horror: "Life is a doormat at the gate of heaven: before entering paradise, everyone has to wipe his feet on it, saints and sinners alike." He tells of the German occupation in the early 40's, the Germans at first being better rulers than the Soviets. But soon the Germans are burning huge heaps of people, tremendous hills that for months give off a stench of still-smoldering human flesh. "The gigantic scale of bestiality in this century...is the work of ridiculous little mannequins who dreamed up their theories in bars and coffeehouses. As a result, the mediocrity of the executioners inadvertently detracts from the victims...[and] gives their fate a touch of indecency." Chubinets falls in with a theatrical troupe, writes a play about himself. At last the Soviets recover the town from the Germans, and Chubinets spends seven years in a labor camp near Siberia. All in Zabrodsky/Gorenstein's mind, of course. Details and moments throughout strike inventive lightning flashes of the highest order--but this is a novel, like salted fish, that not all will wish to chew on. -- Copyright ©1991, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.