

nova · nevedoma



Nevédomosti

nova·nevédoma

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Nevédomosti №1

nova-nevedoma.com/deleted-scenes-essays-updates-and-plans-or-a-lack-thereof/

Greetings, all. Today, in Yours Truly's irregular column, you'll find a fine selection of news from the coffa-scened rooms of Nova Nevédoma's central office in [Tulubaika](#).

Everything about this is irregular, even though it's numbered with "un". The title, "Nevédomosti" is a sophisticated wordplay (as everything about this) that comes as twist on the publication's title and a reference to the format of historical Russian newspapers ("vedomosti") while inverting their purpose of making things known by incorporating the negative prefix "ne-" (not, un-), essentially creating an oxymoronic "gazette of the unknown." Also irregular, this.

Shan't our eyelid waver in the sight of time, and shall we begin.

(1) Complementary materials for the "Deleted Scenes"

In the past few months, I've channeled my writing efforts towards exploring concepts of Truth and Freedom. Even though the seemingly unhealthy obsession with them was forced on me by the Russian predicament and consequentially Two Eternal Russian Questions, "Who is to blame?" and "What's to be done?", I reckon the issues I wrote about are universal and, for better or worse, relatable to many.

Part of my enthusiasm for them has also been driven by topical proximity to my book, ["Deleted Scenes from the Bestselling Utopian Novel"](#), and a desperate urge to promote it in a rather native fashion by plugging it into places where it would feel organic. That, I hope, made essays *complementary* to the book even though the relation is loose and each of them is a standalone work, just like "scenes" from the novel. I wrote about Truth, Freedom, authoritarianism, propaganda, conformity, personal experiences, emigration, and the role of Art and the writer, among other things. The hope is, of course, to make you interested in reading the book if you aren't yet, or at least deliver somewhat parallel messages in non-fiction format for those who prefer that (for some reason, huh).

I do, however, want to take some break from that essay format, try something else for a time being, and focus on fiction. I'm rather worn off and have no more throbbing ideas that demand immediate writing action, and whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent, kek. But I want to mark some sort of checkpoint and at the same time remind you about those essays if you haven't read them (for some reason, huh). Consider this a compilation, a digest. I tend build themes through accumulation rather than a direct statement applying some sort of thematic layering. That's often true both for micro (story) level and macro (book or this digest) level.

Now, here they are, proper bangers, from left to right (not on the political spectrum, mind you):

[“Adaptations of Lurid Dreams”](#), where I explore the use of dreamlike and surreal sequences in the “Deleted Scenes” as a means of processing and understanding the anxieties and political realities of the time, particularly in the context of the oppressions in Russian and the war in Ukraine.

[“Why I Don’t Go to Russia”](#), where I analyse the potential legal consequences I would face if my book were (miraculously or recklessly) published in Russia, highlighting the repressive laws that stifle dissent and the risks associated with speaking out against the regime.

[“Dragons in the Dungeons of Mind”](#), where I analyse the play “The Dragon” by Evgeny Schwartz as an allegory for the enduring nature of authoritarian systems, even after the figurehead of that system has been removed, and how psychological structures of oppression persist in the minds of the populace, making them complicit in the perpetuation of tyranny.

[“How to Be ‘Good’”](#), where I examine the ways in which individuals justify that exact complicity in evil systems, drawing on historical and literary examples such as Nazi Germany and C.P. Taylor’s play “Good”. It’s about how passivity, conformism, and the desire to maintain one’s worldview can lead to the acceptance of atrocities and Evil in general.

[“Truth Crawling Back to Her Well”](#), where I use Jean-Léon Gérôme’s paintings of Truth and discuss the changing nature of truth in a world of technology and information. The essay speaks on the challenges of discerning fact from fiction and the erosion of trust in authorities and

objective reality.

[“On Success in Futile Endeavours”](#), where I “present” my personal framework for navigating a world of seemingly insurmountable challenges and the paradox of action in the face of futility. You’ll read about potential benefits of “microdosing hopium” among other sublime concepts that help to maintain a sense of agency and hope in the face of sheer absurdity (which is the world, “beyond satire” it is).

[“The Art, The Tragedy, The Art of Tragedy, The Tragedy of Art”](#), a piece where the lyrical I deals with an internal struggle with the act of writing amidst tragedy and societal upheaval. The essay questions the role of Art and the artist in times of crisis, meaning and purpose in writing, desire to comment on the state of the world and the overwhelming nature of the present reality and the paradoxical nature of creating art in the face of suffering.

To my surprise, there’s an apophenical narrative, a thread going through the essays, weaving them all together, and I’m happy with the result. While writing this, I realised there’s a lot I would add but at the same time it feels complete. Perchance, there should be a sequel but I won’t force it. What will be, will be. These things could happen. shrugs

What’s more interesting (or less, if you’re a luddite), I put them to Google’s NotebookLM tool to create a podcast which ended up being a hilarious parody on some high-brow pretentious literary discussion between two millennial Americans who were, I must concede, flawlessly flattering at times.

I hope you find great joy in this artificially produced artless piece of soulless shite:

AI-generated podcast about my
essays0:00/1081.121×

(2) Cultural exchange

There's this meme expression in Russian "Пусть блядей корежит" ("Pust' blyadey korezhit"), which describes the delightful process of deriving pleasure and satisfaction from watching people who don't like you experience discomfort or annoyance because of your actions unrelated to them and spew their bitter verbal bile into the void.

I couldn't fully recreate the tone and subtext it implies but, with the help of Konstantin Asimov and M. E. Rothwell, setteled on "Let the fuckers squirm".

It's not schadenfreude and not a sense of karmic justice, it's rather a detached amusement at others' impotent rage, certain satisfaction in not giving a fuck about their opinion.

As when both lefties or righties can't comprehend your transcendent stance and their NPC brains are short-circuiting as they type furious walls of text trying to prove you must be from the "other side". You're not laughing at them, you're not enjoying their confusion—you're just noting their malfunction with a kind of self-aware ironic detachment of

“whatever, let the fuckers squirm” or “love when the fuckers squirm” attitude.

Or in a grander scale, if reality doesn’t align with my notion of Truth, then so much the worse for reality.

(3) New reviews on “Deleted Scenes”

I decided to post all reviews I receive on my books. It’s easy to say given I haven’t received bad ones so far, but I do promise to share ALL, inevitably there’ll be bad ones one day. If you hate my work, please write about it, I’d be curious to learn about this unprecedented phenomenon and what triggered it.

This week I’ve received first two reviews on my books from the people I never known personally. I must say it feels completely different, and, in this particular case, pleasant. Moreover, one of my concerns has been that the “Scenes” won’t work that well without context the book is inspired and based on (again, the infamous Russian predicament), but it doesn’t seem to be the case given all the reviews I’ve received so far from people who aren’t connected to Russia. That is fabulous news for me.

Here’s [a reader review](#) I got via BookSirens platform:

Darker and darker we go — 4/5

This was rough, emotionally charged and crazy all in one.

These little scenes are glimpses, of us spying on the true horror of everyday people, trying to survive in a world that's broken.

But not just broken by man, but broken by demons, the true evil inside and the things humans will do when they think they can get away with it, in a broken world, where most are just trying to survive.

For this to have been fiction, I related to it very hard, this is going to linger with me for awhile.

This was the kind of horror that sneaks up on you and then it's there, and you can't stop, like watching a car crash the horror just builds until it explodes. Fabulous news for you is that you can also become a reviewer on the platform. It'll allow you to [read the book for free](#) but you'll have to swear on the fate of the universe that you'll leave a review.

The second review is a professional review I ordered from [BookLife](#).

In a stream of consciousness, debut novelist Bagaev (author of *The Debut Project and Other Stories*) catalogs the dreams, attitudes, and absurdities of citizens living in a totalitarian dystopia. The vignettes are presented as samizdat errata, material that an "Editorial Committee" has deleted from a government-sanctioned utopian best-seller to preserve the book's "narrative integrity" and avoid a "descent" into "literary anarchy." In these excerpts, readers discover the frozen island nation of Novo Tsarstvo, where the ruthless Tsar rules with

violence and doublespeak: “one needs not lay a stone to build utopia; one can convince the rest they live in one already.” Police wear balaclavas and beat citizens indiscriminately, and the military detonates the lethal “Peace Bringer” bomb on the neighboring enemy island in the name of defense.

The collective inhabitants of Novo Tsarstvo attempt to make sense of their dehumanizing existence by imagining fanciful scenarios of how this fascist world came to be and how they can change it. Their fantasies include a professor creating the sadistic police as a race of pig-faced demons, *Homo demonicus*; a parallel dimension where leaders and newspapers don’t lie and benevolent rulers promote art and science; “television reality” that feeds alternate truths so pervasive that it takes on anthropomorphic form; and the shriveled and feeble Tsar as a marionette manipulated by his officials. Most scenarios are either alarmist or optimistic, but a couple are comical, like one centering on a stalwart woman who ignores the law against owning a cat.

Bagaev’s metaphysical observations strike with chilling accuracy, while the prose, despite the heady invention, is brisk and pointed, the storytelling as fleet as it is wild. A welcome fabulistic playfulness leavens the dehumanizing themes, even as Bagaev explores how a civilization evolves to practice sadism and genocide, the capacity for diverse perceptions of reality, and the steps, however small, it that must be taken to right the world’s wrongs. Readers who love outraged play and literary daring will appreciate Bagaev’s pained, vivid vision.

Takeaway: Clever, outraged novel of storytelling in a totalitarian state.

Comparable Titles: Ken Kalfus, Bruno Schulz.

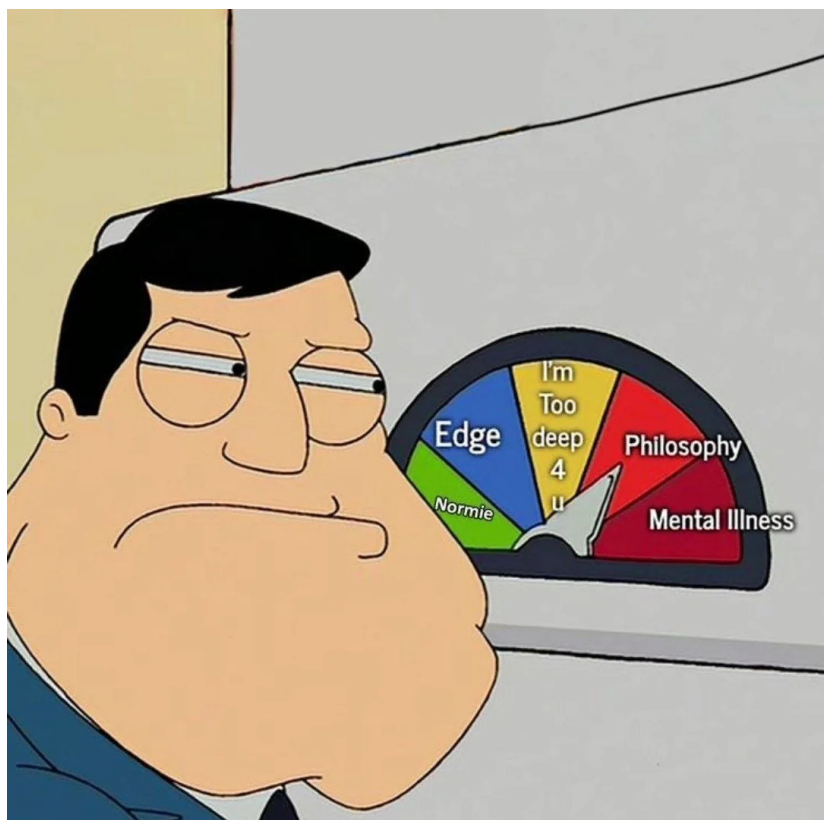
Production grades Cover: A- Design and typography: A Illustrations: N/A Editing: A Marketing copy: A The BookLife review, and the fact it's really good, is significant because it will appear in the December issue of the Publisher Weekly, a magazine that goes to bookseller, libraries, publishers, etc. adding a bit of professional validation and increasing visibility and discoverability of the book, so eventually my work could reach more readers. I've ordered a physical issue of the PW and I'll surely show you how the review appears in print when its out.

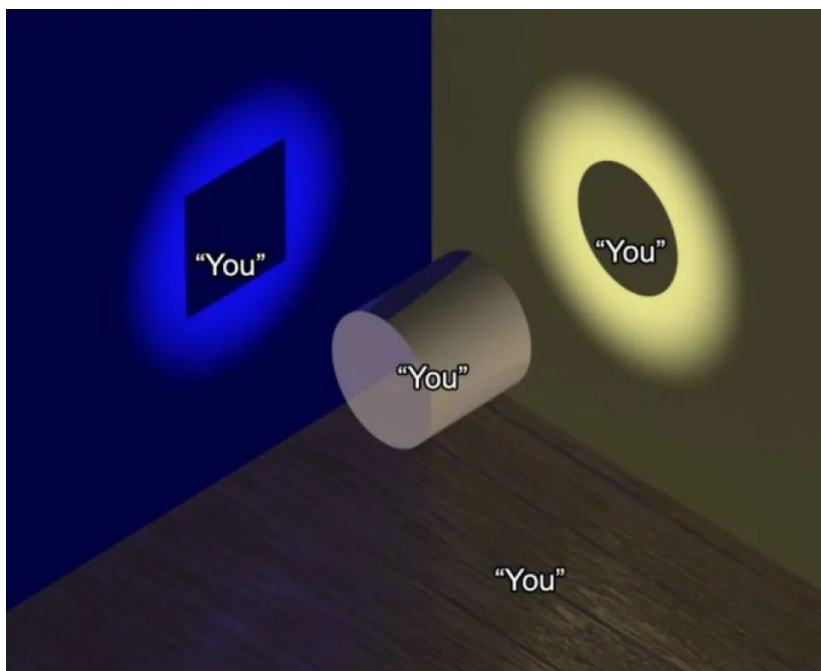
Reviews are crucial for me now not just for self-esteem and validation and some objective evaluation of the quality and such but also for sales. It would be much easier to promote the book, run ads, attract eyes, etm if I have a lot of [good] reviews.

By the way, I've sold around ~85 copies (!), which is a great success for me and makes me very happy. I'd love to reach 100 by the end of this year but I want many things and the Universe doesn't always agree. Despite or in spite, we'll muddle through somehow.

On that note, if you've read the book already please leave a review on Amazon, Goodreads or other places. That would help me immensely.

(4) Assorted memes







And a random cat picture I took today:



Herewith, I make my bow.

Nevédomosti №2

nova-nevedoma.com/nevedomosti-2/

§0 Dearest comrades, I'm writing this with a heavy heart of 250–350 grams while drinking 3 in 1 coffee and experiencing a rather acute lack of sleep and time in an Istanbul hotel, whither a work trip led me. Luckily, I lived in the city for a month five years ago and had a chance to see places and try food and do all the touristic things, because this time it's airport-taxi-hotel-taxi-work-taxi-restaurant-taxi-hotel type of trip with premium-like guidance by my dear colleagues with every day beginning at 7am and ending at 2am next night, partially due to a 3 hour timezone change.

I was going to send this letter later, closer to the end of the year but a lot of good things have already happened this month and many important ones are happening this week with even more later, thus it's better to write it today despite the direst imaginable conditions described above.

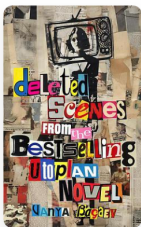


Istanbul through my eyes this week §1.1 I need something from you. My book, [“Deleted Scenes from the Bestselling Utopian Novel”](#) is live

on [Reedsy Discovery with a fresh review](#), where you can also leave comments and “upvote” the book. Upvoting will help with the ranking, hence visibility, discoverability, and my overall satisfaction that, despite hardly could be caused by the upvotes themselves, is achieved when I see “Deleted Scenes” doing well in the wild. It’s currently at [the top of the leaderboard](#) of books published this week on Reedsy Discovery so it has a chance to be featured in their weekly newsletter on Friday.

Published this week

PopularRecent



LITERARY FICTION

ExplicitQ3▲ 23

Deleted Scenes from the Bestselling Utopian Novel
Vanya Bagaev ★★★★★

"Deleted Scenes" is a surreal, experimental dystopian narrative set in the remote, snow-covered island of Novo Tsarstvo, uncanny reflection of contemporary Russia. Through a m...

More upvotes will increase that chance so I want to ask for your help. Reedsy Discovery themselves encouraged me to invite my friends and readers to help with the upvotes and ranking— it’s an expected practice. Thus, if you’ve read the book and liked it or just want to help me promoting it, please login to the website and hit “upvote”. My appreciation for your support is hooked to infinity and has no visible bounds.

[Help “Deleted Scenes”](#)\$1.2 Reviews continue. Luckily (or consequentially) they aren’t like [I imagined a few years ago](#).

A Reedsy Discovery reviewer, Jason Arias, [described the book](#) as following:

There is darkness and light within these pages. A suspended sphere of the cautionary *us*, the roaring of an ice storm building momentum, the stillness of a night just before dawn. Bagaev demonstrates the kind of simmering creativity, layered storytelling, and astute attention to detail that comprise some of the best of our current experimental literature landscape. It's well worth the read. A friend and a fellow STSC member, [Trilety Wade](#) also [wrote](#) many wonderful things about it, such as:

Bagaev writes with such detail and specificity that the reader is grounded in both the physical and emotional aspects of the story. To the point of almost – very effectively – feeling trapped in the story.” Plus, I’ve got [a new review](#) from BookSirens:

To appreciate a dystopian novel, we need to understand some parts of the psychology of mind and manipulation, and this book has put it into words which gives you a better understanding of how a totalitarian system works. As I also [mentioned before](#), this week, on the Dec 12th “Deleted Scenes” will be featured in [the Publisher Weekly](#), including its print edition, a physical copy of which I ordered for myself and will share pictures with you when it arrives.

§1.3 The book is doing well in the meatspace, too. Two weeks ago my wife and I participated in zine fair organised by Pushkin House (“an arts, cultural and social space that explores, challenges and debates Russian culture and identity today”). They also have a bookshop and [the Bookshop Manager was kind to stock](#) a few copies of my book. Thus I’ve reinforced the previous milestone—you can find and purchase my book in one more real, physical book shop! It’s in the heart of London at 5a Bloomsbury Square, if you fancy paying a visit. It is also available for online order.

§2.1 Since the last issue, [I wrote](#) about Chekhov’s play “Three Sisters” and his short story “Gooseberries”. It’s not a book review but a philosophical and psychological inquiry that uses those works to talk about time and its inexorable motion, about fulfilled and unfulfilled aspirations, and a paradox of realisation without catharsis.

Paradoxically, with the passage of time, what accumulates is not only experience but also the absence of experience, such as unfulfilled dreams, missed opportunities, actions of an untaken nature, which, though they don’t exist and have no physical manifestation, often prove more important and defining for a person than those they actually did. §2.2 Other things I published include [my notes on being linked](#) by various types of tongues in a form of I-know-not-what and [my theories of awakening](#) into adulthood in a form of I-know-not-what-either. Both I categorise as “fictions”, for I couldn’t find a fitting word

and they defy any other categorisation. They are good impressions of a writing style I've been exploring this year, an evolution of "Deleted Scenes", in a way, and which I will pursue further and finesse in [Tulubaikaporia](#). It is, by the way, blooming with vivid colours as I have developed a complete shape of the book in my head, "complete", at least, as of now, for, as we know, the completeness is oftentimes subject to change.

§3.1 "Re: style". I have a new crush book, "Day Equals Night, or, The Equilibrium of Diurnal and Nocturnal Starlight" by [Valeria Narbikova](#). Rarely do I find a piece of literature that would resonate with me so much on a stylistic and some unexplainable spiritual level. It's "finding a soul-mate" type of revelation, which immediately puts Narbikova on the list of my favourite authors whose work I want to devour in an instant yet paradoxically savour it longer (another such writer is Sasha Sokolov). That is, however, hard thing to do. Narbikova was among the Russian literary stars in the 90s and even was on an evening show on the national TV in 1996, which is rather unbelievable for an avant-garde writer almost anywhere and says something about the country we could've had but lost. What's more surreal is the guy who interviewed her has become a major propaganda mouthpiece now. Later, while remaining well-known and esteemed in small literary circles, being translated to many other languages, her work didn't "appeal" to publishers, for it was considered "alienating for a mass reader", which creates an aura of impossibility of collecting all of her work, especially printed copies, especially being abroad, as well as any writing about her

work. Sadly, she passed away last month, which I discovered only after reading her book, and which is independent from how I stumbled upon her work.

That, combined with the fact that such a brilliant writer, whose work has a great affinity with mine and will certainly influence it in the future, was so obscure, made me angry and created an urge to share her work with more people. This note is a beginning of that. Now I want, nay need, to write a separate post about Narbikova's work and translate my favourite fragments myself, for somehow, I feel it's a part of my "mission", a random side quest that is somehow necessary to complete should I want to continue with the main storyline.

the palm tree belongs to *its* poet. And, as it turns out, every creator has his own child whom that creator loves more than anything. And only the final creator is not loved by someone as his own child. Sanochka's mama loves Sanochka as her own child. Sanochka's grandmother, who died, loves Sanochka's mama as her own child. God loves his son as his own child. But who loves god as their own child? So, it turns out that god is to be pitied most of all because nobody loves him as their own child; it's not that his mama and papa are dead but that, in principle, they never existed. Everything was arranged beautifully: if there's a sky, then above it there are bound to be a moon and stars, if there's a sea, then there are waves and birds, if there's a forest, or mountains, or a river, there will be what is supposed to be there. God thought everything up beautifully and gave it to his children. But the children pilfered it all: the mountain is mine, the sea is mine, the forest is mine. Only the sky was for everyone—the moon and the stars—because no one is strong enough to snatch up the moon and the stars, although there was hope of eventually taking iron from the moon in trucks. And what had been created by him, by the one whom nobody can love as their own child, was undeniable. It was beautiful and reliable: the mountains don't crumble, the seas don't run dry, or the rivers. Of course, everything created by man was also amusing—cars, boats, planes—but it's obvious that man had fleeced the creator. "Quit dripping already!" With these words Otmatfeian woke up and realized he had been speaking to a drip of thawing snow in his sleep. The drip hadn't answered.

[“Day Equals Night” on archive.org](#) *“The Equilibrium of Diurnal and Nocturnal Starlight” translated by Seth Graham, p. 8, 1999 edition.* §3.2

There's some bitter irony in how I find art and art finds me oftentimes. Whenever I discover an artist, anyone from writers to musicians, next day I find out that either the author has just died or the band ceased to exist, they won't write no more novels or songs, and their

past work is obscure and unreachable. It's a typical situation when I can't buy a book of my new-favourite author or a record of my new-favourite band. It feels sad, even devastating, yet somehow makes their work more precious for me.

§4 This is how my phone transcribed a few minutes voice note from Russian:

Online. What yeah. Beside you. Oh, yeah. Dad, you sit beside me, dad. Should reach you. No. The COI is picked up self promotion. This is Sam, Virginia. Text search to bite. Online stood on iOS side. So I could get to soy in whistling. Change the delete, sir. Put on post is reposted As I forward, Besides, The circuit's ticking to Jim. In the Yeah. You like the Akasharj, Obviously, Option medium or maximum sub stack What? No. Instagram. So I it's not a promotion store. Doesn't Screens. Anastrostatins. Yeah. Body is just an e iOS There's Text because I had to In mere character, Total injured. Which start in. iOS And it was the question context here. Should the start experiment time and more The search now watching over. The. Yep. But you iOS self promotion. 19. Is no hotel. Saviyas Prestige. Hard to say what it means but what I know for sure is that I'll use "anastrostatins" somewhere.

§5 My UK meme license was revoked in November and I couldn't post memes for a few days. To my luck, it was resolved and I won't be

deported. The whole situation was surreal and I documented it on Substack Notes (screenshots are clickable):



Vanya Bagaev 18 Nov

proper sad news, my meme license was revoked yesterday's night. disperse, crowd.

doing my best to get it back tho, but the meme bureau is impregnable

♡ 25

💬 2

↻ 1



Vanya Bagaev 20 Nov

updates on my meme license case: spent four hours on the phone yesterday. the situation is still quite dire. things aren't going well after I threatened to go to them and discuss it in person. will probably hire a lawyer. any suggestions? don't suggest saul

♡ 7

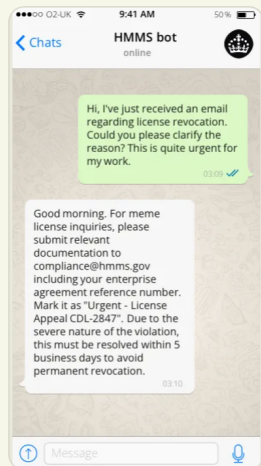
💬 2





Vanya Bagaev 20 Nov

this is bad comrades :(really really bad I'm afraid



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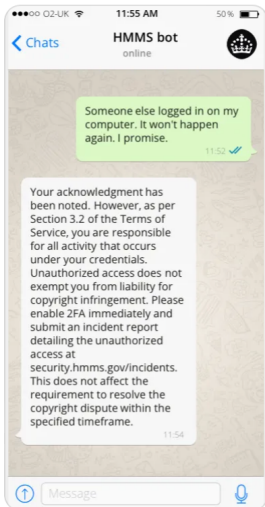


Vanya Bagaev 20 Nov

Nova Nevédoma

...

Doesn't work, I don't know what else to do. I reckon I'm cooked



Laggy 20 Nov

SWIM once said one can always say that someone else logged on to their computer and it won't happen again



Vanya Bagaev 20 Nov

M. E. Rothwell has kindly directed me to the HMMS website, will try to figure it out. Wish me luck.



8



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2



Vanya Bagaev 21 Nov

Addition to my revoked meme license lore:

Apparently it was due to international sanctions and me being a Russian national. Similar happened to my UK pension account and some international money transfers apps.

Now HMMS needs me to come in to their office in person and verify my identity so they can check I am not on any sanctions list. This is required ... ensure memes I share are not sponsored by Putin money.

Going to the HMMS office today 🙌 I guess it'll be cleared soon.



18



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2





Vanya Bagaev 21 Nov

GOOD NEWS

Well, bittersweet.

I've just came back home from the HMMS office where my identity was successfully verified. I'm not on the sanctions lists it seems so my meme license was restored successfully.

However, apparently I have to submit all memes for 'content review' first to prove they're not Kremlin-sponsored propaganda or any right-wing hate speech kind of thing.

Well, at least, I can post again, but it really becomes a minefield walking for me.



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6



1



Nevédomosti №3

nova-nevedoma.com/nevedomosti-3/

§0 This post is an artistic exhumation of pieces I created a while back so thou must abandon all hopes for quality today. It serves my inherent throbbing urge of creating “something”, anything even, whatever that is, absolutely in any medium, totally no difference, as means of expression of I don’t know even what, because why should I? What do we express when create something artistic? Ourselves? Our egos? Emotions? Ideas? Indescribable, unattainable, fragile pieces of Truth or whatnot? Images that we saw or felt and desired to share with the world? I prefer to think this is “pure metaphysics” which renders all attempts of comprehension absurd.



the vibe So, yes, there was a time I was 16 and there was a time I was 21, for better or worse. In those old times I was experimenting with various artistic fields, including prose, verse, scripts, music, visuals, etm. I want to show them to thee as my attempt make a promise for myself, a resolution to do more of that, either this year or at least until the rest of this calendar decade.

After a rather turbulent personal decade (2015-2025 in my case), in

both lovely and stressful ways, on the creative front I've settled on literature, so thou might've noticed before if it's not the first post of mine thou read. If it's the first post, I urge thou to close this and read either [this](#), [that](#), or [maybe this](#), or [even that](#), or, even better so, [this](#) (it's much-much better, *mucho mejor* etm., so better that thou wilt not regret)—all of which are given in random order and any semblance of importance forced upon me by our linear perception of written language, for I cannot (despite I'd very much like so) to shove them up thy thinking centre all at the same time.

§0.1 I've been experimenting with thou | thee | thy | thine today because I so miss the intimacy of “ты” and reverence of “вы” (when it's not plural, of course) and I thought that English can ingest a lot and digest enough, mayhap not as much as Russian can, but still a decent amount, sometimes, in fact, it's fascinating how much this language doesn't care about being harassed, which, of course, isn't even applicable for my usage of thou | thee | thy | thine. I'm gonna use it and thou shalt love it.

§0.2 I also hate forward slashes ////////// look at this // / / and this / / / /
//////// this is fucking ugly, unbelievably / fucking / ugly—

§1 A bit below is a poem I wrote when I was half my present age. It was called “wind” but now I call it “Resolutions”. It was written in Russian, because all I knew of English was spells in World of Warcraft, things like seal of vengeance, avenging wrath, divine shield, judgement, holy wrath, retribution aura, consecration, flash of light, hammer of justice, and such, which weren't enough to compose a poem, or maybe I wasn't

creative enough. So today I present thee an English translation of that poem because I reckon it's not so bad, in fact, one of my English-speaking friends liked it even when it was auto translated into free-verse, which is rather encouraging and, with much hope, not a total embarrassment. Please don't unleash thy holy wrath and hammers of justice.

It's a bit oblivious to me what makes good poetry, especially in English, but my resolution is to fix that in the upcoming months. If thou hast great poetry recommendations I must read, please share them with me. The only requirement is it must be rhymed and metered because that is what I like about Russian poetry (most of it) and I want to implant similar patterns but in English into my brain and then practice so I could write it, too.

So, here's my old poem, translated:

Mayhap it's hard to be a pawn, blind to the chessboard's checkered game,
To tread with care... and dwell upon a thousand twigs of grief and shame.
To be a bird... yet know the hour thou'lt plunge into the chasm's night,
To gasp and sprint— no trace of power— while fate's cold verdict burns too bright.
To sink below, yet clutch the thread of light that swears it never dies,
Recalling one bright blaze, long fled— the joy of summer's cloudless skies.
To be the prey, in frenzied flight, with words like storms to scour the pain,
Then pause, half-smiled, and fix thine eyes on seas that choke the breathless plain.
To trust in truth— gold, pure, unmarred— eternal as the stars' decree, Steel. Stark.
Unbent— till heart is torn in savage glee. To drown in tedious abundance of lost, unnecessary words,
At last to grasp the fragile substance: freedom is wrestled from the gods.

§2 I used to play guitar a lot and even attempted to write music. I knew

zero of music theory but could program drums and other instruments in Guitar Pro, a piece of software that allows you to program guitars, drums, and other instruments, *professionally*. It was a lot of fun and I want to do that again at one point, maybe learning some proper music theory first. That is the second resolution for some mid-term future.

The track below is a short composition recorded with digital instruments (maybe except electric guitar, I don't remember) and has a poor quality, yet I still like it and believe it's not too embarrassing to share it with thee. It has a longer, more metal-like, version, as well as its neighbouring tracks in the "album" I worked on but I won't share those. Be content with little.

It was called "Stolen Journey" but now it's also called "Resolutions". Everything, in fact, called resolutions these days. Stay resolute, droog.

Resolutions0:00/95.582040816326531×\$4 One day, whether a house painter or a graffiti artist approached a white-as-white wall that begged to be written upon, and with all due resolve in his head said:

—I resolutely wish my Self to pour onto the canvas like Angel Falls rather than a stream of piss. Between Self and canvas there exists a layer of obstaculous substrate called society, parental programming, audience demand. I resolutely want to imagine there is no obstaculous substrate, no society, no parental programming—forgive me, my dear parents, I love you but this is the way—and no audience, but rather void, a gaping void of canvas. I resolutely want to imagine that behind this canvas stands thou, the observer. I resolutely want to imagine that upon seeing

this canvas inscribed with my brushstrokes, thou, the observer, wilt rid thyself of thy own obstaclous substrates—[chort](#) knows what they are like on that side—and thou wilt see, thou wilt see everything as I have written it, and see it so seenly that the canvas disappears, and behind it, finally, we will see each other, all our flawed, raw, daring, human nature. In a pure metaphysical sense only, of course.

The wall looked at whether-the-house-painter or whether-the-graffiti-artist and merely shrugged its shoulders:

—Well then splash thine inks and paints, what art thou standing there for, counting flies.

—Paint, not splash, an artist paints.

—Well then paint!

—Well I bloody will!

And he looked at the white-as-white canvas and went ahead and painted, with maxxed resolution.

§5 Another significant resolution, and the one I'm most committed to, is to finish [Tulubaikaporia](#). It is my next book and would contain all the stories about [Tulubaika](#) to form an intricate spiral narrative, absolutely experimental and mind-blowing. The current draft is 65k words but I'm planning to extend some stories, like I've done to "Helix", which from a short story turned into a bit of a novelette. I decided to extend some of the existing stories instead of writing a few more because the ideas and

symbol and themes and characters and all that are connected (or can be connected easily) anyway and most of the Tulubaika mythos is interintegratable and intertextual which makes it possible to turn it into a coherent whole, a symphony with many instruments even.

All stories are now unpublished from my website because I've started editing it all into a one big thing and many things would change.

I ordered a professional book cover from a professional designer so the book will look very professional and I will feel professional myself, so professional that thou, upon seeing the book would think, "Hmmm, indeed quite professional, I must read this!" This is the plan anyway. And I wrote this work-in-progress blurb for a back cover to entertain thee:

TULUBAIKA IS WHATEVER THEE WANTEST IT TO
BE, MATE

In a land beyond, beyond, in a village that may or may not exist, where time flows in spirals and Truth dances naked through golden birch groves, lives the last Tulubayev — or mayhap the first. Everyone has either left or not yet arrived. All of them — prodigal sons and daughters, drunken philosophers, truth-seeking wanderers, cats with questionable metaphysical abilities — are haunted by the image of Tulubaika and the meaning it holds. Is it a village, a vague memory, a phantom, a chimera, a part of a vodka or mushroom induced delirium, just a word even, or none of those? Is it nothing or is it everything? Is it a deadlock or a way

through? Is it an amorous hallucination or [redacted]? Nobody knows, but somewhere between the lines of these pages is the answer. Or mayhap a better question.

Part magical realist fever dream, part folk tale, part philosophical farce, part elegiac reflection, Tulubaikaporia weaves a darkly comic and at times tragic story of belonging, memory, time, and the comfy absurdity of longing for impossible things. I describe Tulubaikaporia as a novel rather than a story collection. It's more than just a collection or an anthology. Having a novel comprised of interconnected short stories and novellas isn't new at all for Russian literature (and [not new for me](#)) so I'm confident I'm not a delulu. Many stories, some of the most voluminous ones, follow the same character, an unnamed protagonist | narrator as he encounters other characters: his childhood friends, his grandfather, random bus passengers, etm. on his journey to Tulubaika. Plus there are "variations" on Tulubaika, chapters each looking at it from a different angle. After a long struggle I finally figured out the structure, so I do have high hopes to conjure a proper magical piece of artistry.

Nevédomosti №4

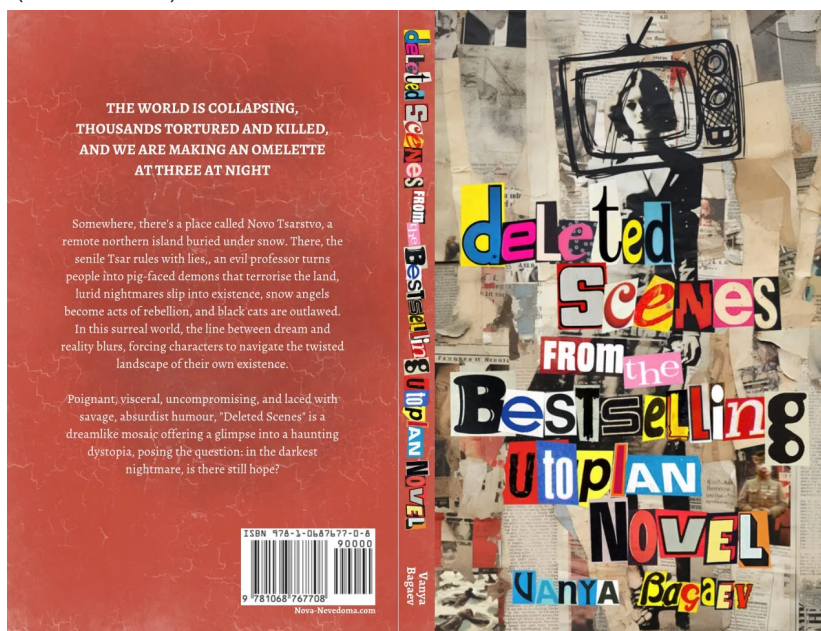
nova-nevedoma.com/the-strange-afterlife-of-books-nevedomosti/

Nevédomosti is a regularly irregular and irregularly regular blog about the publication's updates and other matters of interest and curiosity.

§1 My opus [“Deleted Scenes from the Bestselling Utopian Novel”](#) has been regaining some momentum lately. A few wonderful, surreal, magical things happened that made me to update my expectation of what the actual half-life and afterlife of a newly published book is and invigorated the fading attempts to spread the word about the book—there's really not much needed to be done to make a writer happy, mayhap slightly more than to imagine Sisyphus happy, but not marginally so.

I don't have much experience in samizdating a book and I don't have a particular time range in mind but a few months back the sales and whatever buzz that was left all stalled and I started forgetting the book existed. I do exaggerate here, of course, but there's plenty of truth to it. I operate in a way that when a thing is done, it's done, and it's hard to force myself to do anything related to it, such as to write a post like this or even sporadically talk to people about it in a casual conversation, especially in a situation while I'm working on another [magnum] opus¹ that occupies most of my free time, attention, and writerly passion,

among dozens of other things I want to do. But yes, to my surprise, “Deleted Scenes from the Bestselling Utopian Novel” still exists (wow, actually) and, to even more pleasant surprise, has been doing really well (wowest wow).



Thanks to my dear friends, I managed to get the book displayed for sale on a few events of the Russian opposition in London, to which, despite being in English, the book naturally, given its topicality, has a great relevance. The proceedings from that go to the organisation; I practically donate the books for the good cause.

A few new readers found my book via that route. After one of the aforementioned events, a protest in front of the Russian Embassy

against the increasingly tightening Russian homophobic laws, “Deleted Scenes...” was displayed again together with other merchandise for fundraising, that time with my presence. I’m still probably extremely naive and oblivious of the fact that what I write can be interesting to someone beyond a polite acknowledgement and moreover resonate with them, so when I get positive feedback of such kind, it always feels surreal and, in a way, unbelievable, yet of course making me happy deep inside, but that time the interest and the feedback was face to face² as I managed to meet a few readers in real life ([even one reader from Substack](#); most radiant beams of appreciation, !) and sign some copies of the book.

At the same time, be it related or not, I’ve seen more people on here expressing interest in my work on Substack. published a long wonderful heartwarming review of “Deleted Scenes...” in which she offers a lot of thoughtful and positive commentary:

When I ordered *Deleted Scenes from the Bestselling Utopian Novel* online, I was expecting a book. What I received was a transformative experience. To be deeply moved by a work of art is a gift, and to experience this as the real circumstances reflected by the work persist is somewhat rare. Readers who enjoy poetics, humor, and experimental forms will revel in this timely piece of fiction by up-and-coming author Vanya Bagaev. ... At times like this, creative work offers comfort. Art can soothe what is too painful to comprehend by transmuting suffering

into aesthetic beauty, cathartic humor, and transportive storytelling. It can also unmask reality and help the audience understand and be understood. *Deleted Scenes* accomplishes both, and does so with a strong sense of artistic freedom that resonates with the story's powerful themes of resilience. ... Vanya Bagaev's *Deleted Scenes from the Bestselling Utopian Novel* is not only a gift to the oppressed but to the observer. It is a forceful call to turn toward what matters and a brave stand against apathy and despair. It is also an aesthetic piece of art that can be admired for its beauty, which provides generous conventional framework to support the rich poetics, text art, and experimental narrative play which stimulate the imagination and invite the reader to revel in all that is possible. There's a lot more in Annie's generous and insightful review, including a pinch of criticism, so I do recommend to read it fully, whether you've read the book or plan to. I'm grateful, honoured, and deeply moved, thank you, Annie!

You can read the full review and check out her other work on her Substack:

[Deleted Scenes From The Bestselling — Read on Substack](#)I'm dazed and thankful for all this happening and all the time people are willing to dedicate to my work and spreading the word about it and thankful for all your support. It is often, as I said before, the only reminder that I've created something important, not only for me but someone else, for

you, and it's you precisely who makes the book alive after its published and roams free in the literary wildscapes. Thank you.

A lot of people have recently expressed the interest in the book, including those whose geographical location or financial situation doesn't allow them to grab a copy freely. If you're in a similar predicament, don't hesitate to reach out to me, either email me at [vanya \[at\] nova-nevedoma \[dot\] com](mailto:vanya[at]nova-nevedoma[dot]com) or send a direct message on Substack, and we'll solve that:

If you wish to have a signed copy of the book or want a copy for writing a review, whether digital or physical, just reach out and we'll solve that, too.

§2 “You can't leave it be,” I said to myself. If you've already written the book, help her get on her feet. We are, they say, responsible for those we have tamed. I'm not talking about ruthless self-promotion, which I'm always uncomfortable with, and even if I wasn't, I wouldn't have a skill or enough time to do it. Everything here happens by intuition, *achance*³. My tendency to shelf a thing that's done hasn't proven to be effective when it comes to *samizdar* which at some point even made me think the whole undertaking isn't for me. I just want to write, you know, but I also want to do it my own way, free from constraints, which doesn't make it easier. That's the thing about writing and publishing fiction, at least about “the type” I've chosen to write—I have to care about it even after the last full stop, even after its published, even when I'm working on another [magnum] opus. Semantic network of

“care” here includes, progressively: look after, attend to, cherish, worship. Hence, the new perspective—thinking of the book as a life-long project rather than a done-and-move-on project. I still believe it’s worth your time and attention, it’s my first serious work⁴, it’s the work I’m still proud of and don’t cringe when reading a random passage from it like it often happens with older works. With “Deleted Scenes...” I reckon I’ve reached my own sufficient level of non-cringeness, even though I often think I could’ve done it better now, sometimes even much better, sometimes even completely differently, yet I don’t feel I did it *wrong* way.

My role as “a writer” has ceased to matter for the book, for I’m not writing it anymore, not editing, not changing anything; it’s become a solid piece of text that changes and mutates only when a reader opens it and allows it in, the readership that also includes me now. I do believe my writer’s role for “Deleted Scenes” is over but there’re plenty of other roles I have to fulfil, mayhap as its main, but not only, custodian, keeper, steward. It’s a different role compared to both “a writer” and “an author” and requires me to adopt different thinking. I really want the book to succeed as much as possible given what it is not just as someone who wrote it—that person doesn’t exist anymore—but someone who loves the results and reckons it important and worthy. So I’ve decided to put a bit more effort into “talking about the book” as that custodian of it.

Any text is a different text every time it’s read by a different person. With “Deleted Scenes”, I can only talk about the premise, the original

intention, the goal of writing it retrospectively, from the present position, but it wouldn't be fair to the person who started writing it. Why did that person do that? I've no idea why. It felt good? Was fun? Relieving? The original feelings, ideas, emotions were sublimated at the time unto the text and now are rationalised beyond recollection. The reader always know better what the book is about and why it's important. I've noticed that many times while receiving feedback on the book regardless of the form. Thus I want to dedicate a few more posts⁵, whether it's an essay, a bit of literary criticism, a tour across [potential] influences, or something else, on the topics and other literature around the book, what and positions it in the literary tradition, and ultimately, regardless why it was written, why it's still an important book for me, now as a reader, too.

Notes

1. For the curious: "[Tulubaikaporia](#)" is alive and well. I've finished the first round of editing. Now two more rounds are left: sound editing and grammar | spelling | formatting editing. I don't know the proper names for the two. Sound would involve listening to the whole thing, either vocalised in my head fully, or read aloud by myself or read aloud by a computer, which have gotten pretty advanced and helpful on that front lately. This would take me a few months to complete. Meanwhile, two artists are working on the visual aspects of the book: the cover and the illustrations. When it's all done, I'll open pre-orders and send ARCs, with the aim to officially launch the book closer to the end of this year, once I get enough reviews pre-launch. I've heard that's what "professionals" are doing and decided why not to try that, too. The book is 450 pages long (big font), 50 of which are footnotes and commentary to translation. The book is written by Vanechka (me) and translated by Vanya Bagaev (don't know him). Most of it is written in Russian, not just as rough drafts, so the commentary to translation felt crucial, even

though complementary and hopefully not disrupting to the experience of the book, for they'll be provided as endnotes. I'll come back to this with more information later this year.

2. I participated in a few indie bookfairs last year, but the feeling there was completely different. Won't elaborate. Or will, just a little: it was stressfully fun, sobering, inspiring, and, depending on the bookfair in question, had weird "peddler of some random texts" vibe, which wasn't even remotely present in the occasion mentioned here.
3. There's [Russian "avos"](#) and now there's English "achance". In both cases, it's an attitude that finds comfort in unpredictability and absurdity of the endeavour.
4. Serious meaning "for adults" or "those who're bothered with life" or "literary" or something else I know not what. Just "serious". "Serious piece of work," they say, "solid, formidable." A lot of it in the book is, of course, grotesque, surreal, absurd and far away from serious, seemingly so, because absurd is always only a façade. My [first book](#) wasn't "serious" in a sense I'm implying. It was funny, engaging, interesting, satirical, poignant, entertaining, and serious in other senses. It's a good work I'm also proud of and a great milestone for me as a writer and an author but it's not the type of work that I think about now and then. I do sometimes think of certain aspects or episodes of it, but it doesn't make me want to share it with the world as much as "Deleted Scenes", which is a sad thing to say, yes, but there's nothing I can do about that feeling. Mayhap, I'm just a different person now.
5. There're actually "complementary materials to "Deleted Scenes..." shared in [the first issue of Nevédomosti](#), a range of personal and literary essays that explore themes of around the book: "[Adaptations of Lurid Dreams](#)", where I explore the use of dreamlike and surreal sequences in the "Deleted Scenes" as a means of processing and understanding the anxieties and political realities of the time, particularly in the context of the oppressions in Russian and the war in Ukraine. "[Why I Don't Go to Russia](#)", where I analyse the potential legal consequences I would face if my book were (miraculously or recklessly) published in Russia, highlighting the repressive laws that stifle dissent and the risks associated with speaking out against the regime. "[Dragons in the Dungeons of Mind](#)", where I analyse the play "The Dragon" by Evgeny Schwartz as an allegory for the enduring nature of authoritarian systems, even after the figurehead of that system has been removed, and how psychological structures of oppression persist in the minds of the populace, making them complicit in the perpetuation of tyranny.

[“How to Be ‘Good’”](#), where I examine the ways in which individuals justify that exact complicity in evil systems, drawing on historical and literary examples such as Nazi Germany and C.P. Taylor’s play “Good”. It’s about how passivity, conformism, and the desire to maintain one’s worldview can lead to the acceptance of atrocities and Evil in general. [“Truth Crawling Back to Her Well”](#), where I use Jean-Léon Gérôme’s paintings of Truth and discuss the changing nature of truth in a world of technology and information. The essay speaks on the challenges of discerning fact from fiction and the erosion of trust in authorities and objective reality. [“On Success in Futile Endeavours”](#), where I “present” my personal framework for navigating a world of seemingly insurmountable challenges and the paradox of action in the face of futility. You’ll read about potential benefits of “microdosing hopium” among other sublime concepts that help to maintain a sense of agency and hope in the face of sheer absurdity (which is the world, “beyond satire” it is). [“The Art, The Tragedy, The Art of Tragedy, The Tragedy of Art”](#), a piece where the lyrical I deals with an internal struggle with the act of writing amidst tragedy and societal upheaval. The essay questions the role of Art and the artist in times of crisis, meaning and purpose in writing, desire to comment on the state of the world and the overwhelming nature of the present reality and the paradoxical nature of creating art in the face of suffering. I want to organise them into a separate section here on Substack and on my website for the ease of navigation for the curious. From time to time, I grow weary of writing essays, especially personal essays, but I’ve accumulated enough thoughts and topics to plunge into that bog again.

Nevédomosti №5

nova-nevedoma.com/nevedomosti-5/

§1 Re: New heights. Be it odd and accidental, be it fateful, consequential, a few good things happened lately, even tho I'm being humble marking them modestly as "good", for they are rather remarkable and unprecedented for me: my story "Dragonfly's Retinal Structure" was shortlisted for the William Saroyan International Prize for Short Fiction, making into the top 10 amongst 108. You can find [my story](#) and the whole shortlist on [the contest's website](#).

"Dragonfly's Retinal Structure" is a special piece for me, beloved even, one of my favourites, and it genuinely makes me happy the story gained such significant recognition despite being rather "unusual" in technique and style. I don't want to say "experimental" — tho some might feel that — for I don't like the term, moreover I wasn't experimenting writing it, but regardless, seeing it recognised in serious competition by serious people is an important accomplishment for my literary endeavours. The story's also an episode in my upcoming-ish and book "[Tulubaikaporia](#)", rather a lyrical and free variation on its main theme: [Tulubaika](#).

None of my works have gotten thus far in any context (tho I don't really submit much; was rejected when did), so, as said — unprecedented. The final where the winner was announced happened in Yerevan on the 7th

of September, a few days ago, where my wife and I went for just a day — quite a journey, apparently, given no direct flights and necessity to be in yet another country on Monday. The experience was rather surreal, given most of the event was in Armenian and we didn't understand a word; only the international prize was announced in English by a person from the Saroyan Foundation. Alas, Yours Truly didn't win anything, but he's a simple man: a shortlist is a still a shortlist! Congratulations to Lusine Kharatyan with her story [#America_place Pregnant](#) for winning the prize.

§2 Re: Podcast appearance. Another fun and flattering thing that happened to me, or with me being involved, is [my appearance on a podcast](#) with and , where we talked about my book [“Deleted Scenes from the Bestselling Utopian Novel”](#), literature — especially Eastern European and Russian — writing in English as a second language, self-publishing, censorship and emigrant experience, literary identity, amongst other curious topics. If you'd like to hear us talking about all that, you can listen to the first 35 min for free, with the whole 1h40m available to paid subscribers to Buku's newsletter. The transcript is also available.

And short review on the book by her:

Deleted Scenes from the Bestselling Utopian Novel—
perceptive, quietly pessimistic, as though quietly stands in his
corner and mocks the rest of us, ponders about Russia and

totalitarian regime ; satiric, with dialogue that pulls you into his dystopian world and its hallucinations, lunacy (his words) and surrealism, Vanya is someone to look out for in the years to come.

§3 Re: [“Deleted Scenes...”](#). The book is one year old this September! The time indeed has flown by and it’s hard to believe it’s been a whole year: it either feel both forever and yesterday, distant past and everlasting present. During that year: I’ve sold close to two hundred copies (stopped counting), participated in a few bookfairs, the book was stocked [in the Pushkin House bookshop](#) in London, many readers wrote some lovely reviews, I wrote a few essays as [complementary materials for the book](#). In short, I’m happy to see the book doing well, reaching new heights, collecting appreciations and kind words, and, frankly, being loved by the readers. For all of which, I’m thankful to all of you supporting the book and myself as well!

For the rest of you who haven’t read it (yet), it’s yet another reminder to grab a copy. There’re a few ways to do that:

- Links to book stores (including direct sales from my store) are on [the book’s page on my website](#). You can also just search it online — many retailers have it.
- I can ship you a signed copy to wherever you’re on Earth. It might take a bit longer and incur some extra shipping costs.
- Theoretically, you can try asking your local library to order it. I’ve n’t heard people doing that but might be worth a shot.

Plus, I do believe I have more things I can tell you about the book,

whatever that is: publishing process, writing process, inspirations, influences, themes, etc. Yet I don't know if there's anyone interested reading about any of that and what that "any" really includes. So...

I decided to run some semblance of a Q&A here. You can send me any questions about the book by replying to this email (or *vanya [at] nova-nevedoma [dot] com*), sending a direct message on Substack, or leaving a comment here. Later I'll collect all those questions and answer them in a few posts... or zero, in case of no questions, but if that happens I would of course be really sad and probably terminate my literary career at once...

§4 Re: The state of NoNe. This might constitute as another accomplishment worth celebrating or it might: I don't know really and feel rather oblivious to what's going on, how and why — surreal, that — but more and more people are subscribing to Nova Nevédoma, more and more people reading my work, more and more people sharing it. The publication is approaching 2000 subscribers (1890 now) — an unimaginable number for me just a few years back — and would likely reach it by the end of October or so. I am, as mentioned, a simple man, so this does feel good, even tho it hardly affects what I write, how, and when, but anyway... it's been a wild journey and I'm grateful to all of you for being with me here! Sending most radiant beams of appreciation and virtual hugs...

A small digest in case you missed any of the recent posts I'd like to highlight:

- I wrote my own [guide to contemporary Russian literature](#) for featuring a good dozen Russian books in translation that you can find and read, everything: new realism, magical realism, wild dystopias, futuristic visions, historical fiction, experimental novels, etc. The article is a series of short reviews and some cultural and political context surrounding the literary scene in Russia. I do highly recommend you to check it out!
- What I would call “the fiction summer”, a series of short stories that might or might not become one conceptual book about children and adults later on. These four stories were highly praised by my readers; some even referred to them as my finest writing to date, which is, of course, again, lovely to hear and I do consider an accomplishment:

[On and of erotic undercurrents of Infinity](#)

- [How I Spent My Summer \(essay\)](#)
- [Soul Epidemic](#)
- [Was or Wasn't, Would've or Wouldn't've Been](#)

On this note, I bow away! ...

P.S. Visual entertainment section

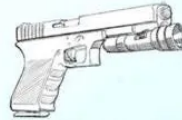
EVERY DAY CARRY



Chainmail Hauberk
(to deflect enemy blades)



Sixteen Decoy Wallets
(zero real ones)



Tactical Glock 9mm
(just needed a flashlight)



Pacifier & Blankie & Baby Toy



A Rose
(for my beloved)



Santiago



The Keys to Heaven and Hell
(forgot to label them)



The Weight of Knowledge



300 Loads of Cement Per Hour
(faster than any machine)



Picture of Ma
(x16)

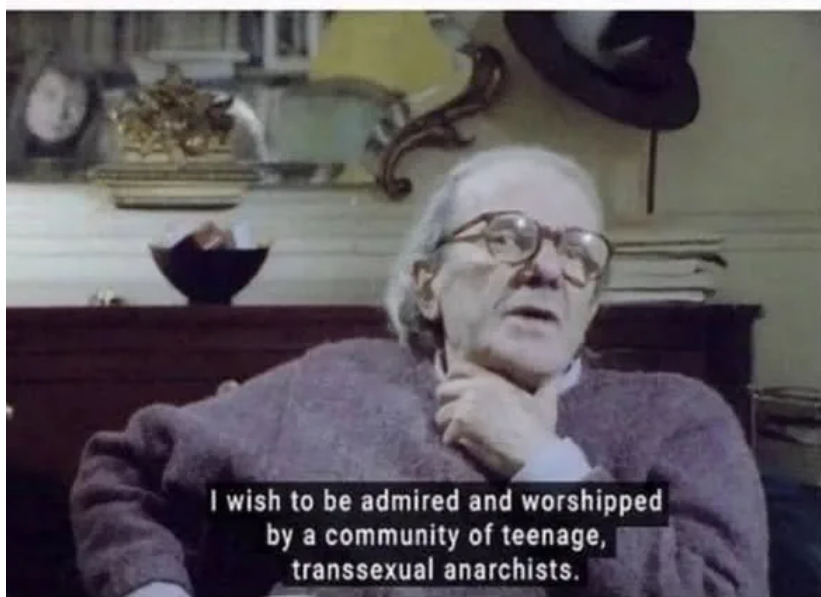


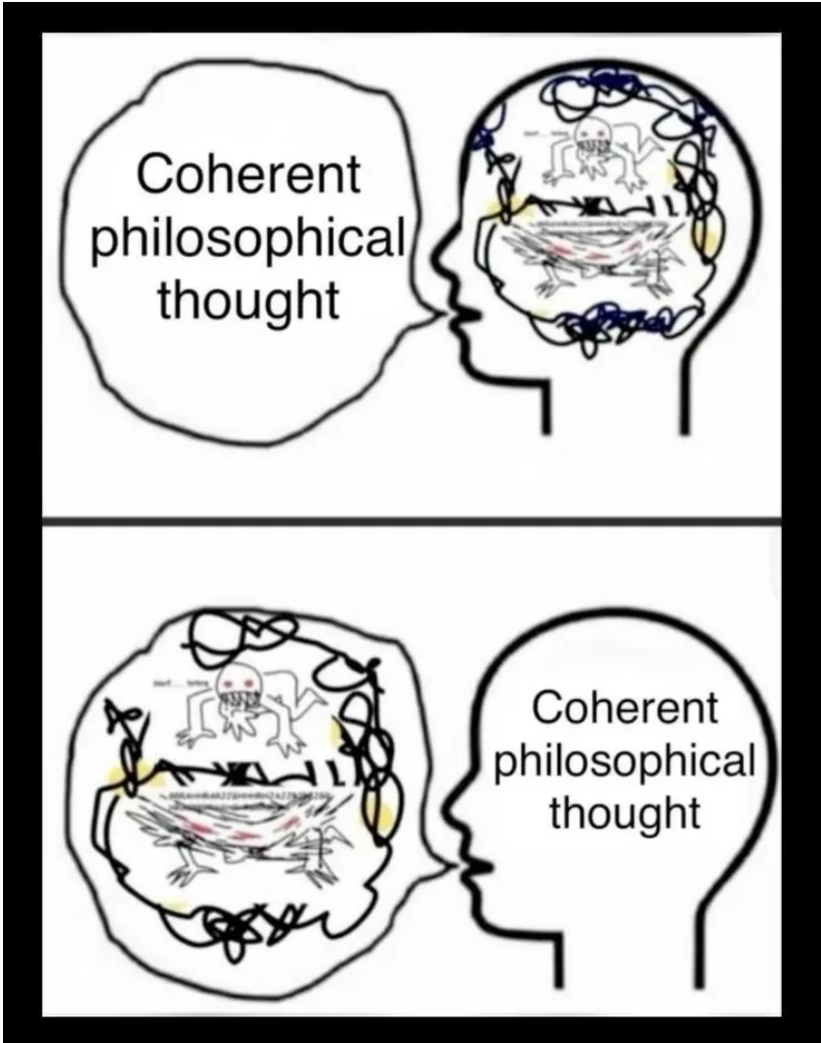
Cyanide Pill
(in case of capture)



Your Heart
(on a string)







Nevédomosti №6

nova-nevedoma.com/re-substack-to-print-short-story/

*The issue today covers a lot of “what to read” as well as adjacent thoughts on the craft and publishing. You’ll find a few reviews of my book plus two reviews I’ve written for others: a story/essay collection by * and a novel by.**

This is something new for me — I had never written a capital R Review before these two (!) — but it’s something I want to do more, especially for my contemporaries, friends and fellow writers, to all of whom I believe (having skin in the game) every review is a gift. I want to start with 2-in-1 post but might publish standalone reviews later under Nevédomosti section, depending on the timeline and their length.

Before we begin, if you’re hungry for short fiction, and I collaborated on an experimental short story, touching on rather whimsical and profound topics. Check it out on her Substack:

[With The Speed Of Flatulence — Read on Substack](#)

Re: “I Won’t Keep You” by

When I opened the book today to grab some quotes I found a dead

spider stuck between the pages. Let's consider it poetic but symbolic of nothing, rather just factual, a little artefact hidden within the book that I believe would appreciate having it.



This is also a beauty of physical books, especially those that started on Substack. You know the feeling; many have attempted describing it since the rise of digital word, but Vladimir Sorokin did it best: “You can spill coffee on a book or even place a hot coffee pot on it, you can burn

it with a cigarette. [...] You can drench it with tears, wine, blood, sperm. And all of this will remain on it as a memory of the reader. [...] But what can an iPad do? Tears or blood will run off it, leaving nothing behind.” Spider would’ve slid down and run away, too.

“I Won’t Keep You” is a collection of short stories and essays that had appeared on Trilety’s Substack of the same name.

trilety.substack.com — [Read on Substack](#) Substack or any blog or any feed is chronological at the point when it’s written and published — stories are often published in the order they are written — and very likely reverse-chronological or non-chronological when you just discover the publication and start digging the archive. Ultimately, a reader decides what route to take which determines the final experience — whether you start with “Top” or “Most Popular” or “Recent” or just go randomly. As a writer, however, I do believe the order plays an important role in any anthology or short story collection, so when I got the book in my hands, my excitement was not only to read it all again, for I’d read most, but to experience it in a new intended order.

In Andrei Bitov’s “The Symmetry Teacher” he describes why the order matters in the fictional “preface” to the book that is framed as a translation of a series of novellas:

Each chapter of ‘The Teacher’ can be read as a separate work; the reader is free to give preference to one or another as an independent story, but if he masters all in succession and hears

the echo spreading from the previous to the next and from each to each, then he will discover its source, that is, he will read the novel itself, not a collection of stories. It's something I'm looking for in any collection or even in a novel, nay *nouveau roman*, and also something I've been trying to achieve in my work. Trilety's book, despite being a compilation of very diverse and seemingly unrelated fictions, autofictions, and essays, does that great. It unfolds and echoes via associations, threads, recurring motifs and symbols: femininity, body, loss, grief, eroticism, animals, insects, our connection with nature and self. Often one story ends with an image, idea, concept, symbol, theme, and the next story picks it up in a different setting and continues it, building up the momentum. Despite its title, "I Won't Keep You", on the contrary, it "keeps you", paradoxically so.

"My official diagnosis came two years ago. But I've suffered from Cyborg Syndrome since the age of eight, when the conifers couldn't protect me from the violence of mothering. The difference between being mothered and being smothered is the difference between a wave and a hurricane." — (12) *Glaciers are the Gaolers of Floods* Although the book deliberately tells us that it is a work of both fiction and non-fiction, as a reader, you'd hardly notice the difference. The only — but hardly reliable clue — would be PoV, where you can safely say that all third person stories are fiction and all female first person are

autofictional essays. That, however, didn't matter for me, despite having followed Trilety for a while and know a fact or two about her. The book is uniform in style and voice and blurs the distinction between fiction and non-fiction and in that sense is a single work. It is still "a collection" but, in addition to careful ordering, it also has "a core" that makes it whole.

"They say that gaslighting is done to us by others but sometimes we are the ones who gaslight ourselves until we've warped our own reality so badly there is nothing left to question and no one left to love." — (33) Elbow Bend and Back Again Each of the little pieces is closer to poetry than prose: playful, dreamy, extremely lyrical, metaphorical, airy, yet bodily and grounded in reality. Despite often heavy themes and underlying indescribable melancholy behind the façade, most stories often make you smile and even have happy endings. Often whenever I waited for something sad or absurd to happen, none did, either ending on a positive note or leaving it open.

It's hard to make a list of favourites, and I don't see much value in going over each story; as I said, they are closer to poetry, and why would you be doing short retellings of poetry to someone? Instead I've already put some highlighted quotes above and a few below. Most memorable moment was the beginning of the story "Map of Nostalgia", a topic so dear to me in its traditional sense, the feeling that Trilety describes brilliantly:

“Nostalgia’s start was in a heartache for home. Yet now nostalgia is used to describe a longing for the past. I am lost and looking for a map to find my way back. If I were a Cartographer of Longing, I would chart my Homesickness for you with push pins and strings, connecting the cord between the places of your past. A friend of mine was raised on the island of Guadeloupe. She told me of a tradition where the godparents take the newborn’s umbilical cord and plant it with a tree, along with wishes and prayers for the baby to grow as strong as its sapling companion. Ray said, “In Creole, *la lombric an mwen téré*, means home is where my umbilical is buried.” Do Creole children suffer less from nostalgia because they know the location of their earthworm origins? Ever a home to return to. But, what is Death’s umbilical cord? If we snip a nutrient-giving tube at birth, what bond is snipped at death? There is no regeneration of worm, only a fizzle of electric current that turns into eternal quiet.” — (21) Map of Nostalgia This is what makes Trilety’s writing special for me — she has a rare gift of arranging those pins and strings, finding unexpected, strange yet profound association between seemingly incompatible things, even polar opposites. On every page you’d stumble on sentences and phrases that amongst all people only Trilety could say, such as another one:

Only big toe knows that flip-flops were designed to isolate. — (34) Belle Isola I didn’t want to make a review “a consumer

guide” — probably it’s hard to make one for a dense and diverse work like “I Won’t Keep You”, especially if it’s my first one — instead, I wanted to convey why it matters for me. Should you read it and why? If you like lyrical, observant, and playful prose, if you long for great literary short fiction, and if you trust my taste — yes, this book is for you.

I wanted to have “a Substack shelf” but I have to put “I Won’t Keep You” next to Valeria Narbikova on my shelf. I can’t explain my logic; the books are just soulmates, if it’s possible amongst books. My guess is Narbikova and Wade at some point somehow connected to the same metaphysical Source, perhaps with the umbilical cord.

[My Book Is Out And Ready For You — Read on Substack](#)

Re: “the big T” by



Me, performing (and accidentally cosplaying) “the big T” wasn’t my typical read when it comes to novels, and yet I read it faster than most books of the same size and it ended up being one of the most enjoyable novels I read recently. It also [started on Substack](#), but this time I came to the print version first — a preferred way for me to read a novel.

Before picking it up, I wasn’t sure that the story would resonate with me, mostly worried I wouldn’t “get it”: a modern American bildungsroman about long-lasting friendship between Jude, the narrator, and Tommy, the big T in question. Naturally, someone from a relatively remote Russian village with a radically different upbringing, even though close enough age-wise, could hardly relate to most of what the characters are going through — that someone only has a reductive

high-level movie-based picture of what it's like to grow up in the United States in the 90s-00s and beyond. And yet, despite the geographical and cultural difference, a universal experience of being a child, a teenager, a young adult, of having and losing the loved ones, finding who you are and who you want to be, is still resonating and, well, relatable. It is, first and foremost, an interesting and engaging story, for one spanning years — brilliantly plotted, each chapter being an important episode in the characters' lives. Structure-wise, there's a lot to compliment, both the selection of those events, their more or less standalone nature that however pull you into the story deeper and deeper, and especially my favourite — last sentences. They are something to pay attention to, admire and study. Clancy's done an amazing job there. "Lives flew by" is how I would describe it, which has its pros and cons: you can watch the characters' lives unfold in front of your eyes just in a few evenings, but you have to watch them grow up and move on to the next stage in their life, bittersweetly in case you want to stay in some periods for longer time and explore them more. It is a tour de force rather than a saga, so you should expect years to flash and characters grow before your eyes.

As with any story, especially coming-of-age, you're not only reading the book but also reading your past, filtering what you experience in the book through what you experience in real life. "the big T", covering middle school, high school, college, young adulthood, and later years in the epilogue, has a lot of life in it (pun intended): memories, celebrations, conflicts, dilemmas, etc. in which many readers would

maybe see themselves or people they grew up with, remember those times, relish, nostalgise, grieve. For me, however, it was different, often in a weird, paradoxical way. Friendship I experienced wasn't at all similar to the relationship between Jude and Tommy; I've never lived through something like that, so the book didn't have many "literally me" moments. Instead of reading "what happened", I read "what could've happened but never did", trying to imagine an alternative universe where in my earlier years I could've had a friend like Tommy. You can be a shy, introspective child who, perhaps, deep inside wants to be charming and rebellious, or you can be one of a certain mental and psychological constitution that is rare to find in your peers, thus making it hard to create a real lasting emotional and intellectual bond with most. From that angle, Tommy appears as an ideal friend both as a cure for intellectual and emotional loneliness that many may experience in life — sort of a second you, the only person able to understand you fully — and as a wanna-be-you, someone you would want to be but couldn't and could only feel an inexorable magnetic pull towards. In "the big T" it was both; Jude and Tommy both complement and challenge each other, which is rare and even felt idyllic.

An idyll or a nostalgic childhood mystery — the feeling that follows you through the first half of the book — in a way, an impossible could-be life that you want to linger forever, that universal sensibility of happy childhood for those who have experienced it that way. Having read many "dark books" in the recent years, I always expected something bad to happen (again, yes) by the end of the chapter to get the plot going but

it wasn't necessary; the book in the first half is mostly wholesome, at times melancholic and bittersweet, especially in those wonderful last sentences. The second half won't get significantly darker but, together with the characters, the psychological and thematic layer will become more mature and complex, eventually venturing into the promised spiral of existential struggle and self-destruction that is painful to watch. The questions "who am I?" and "what do I want in life?" take over the narrative for both Jude and Tommy as they head off to college. Both of them want to be artists — a writer and a poet — but life, i.e. their parents, prevents them from it, pushing them into unwanted studies. For both it becomes a struggle: for Jude, more measured and reasonable, it eventually ends well; for Tommy, one who wants to take anything from life and live fast — his last name being Goodspeed for a reason — it doesn't. This way we see two so alike and yet so different men going through alike and yet so different challenges.

As we see the idyll breaking, or rather slowly disintegrating, or rather becoming real, deep and complicated, the book gradually yet rapidly shifts from little "t"s towards bigger "T"s — pun intended as well, and thus described by the narrator:

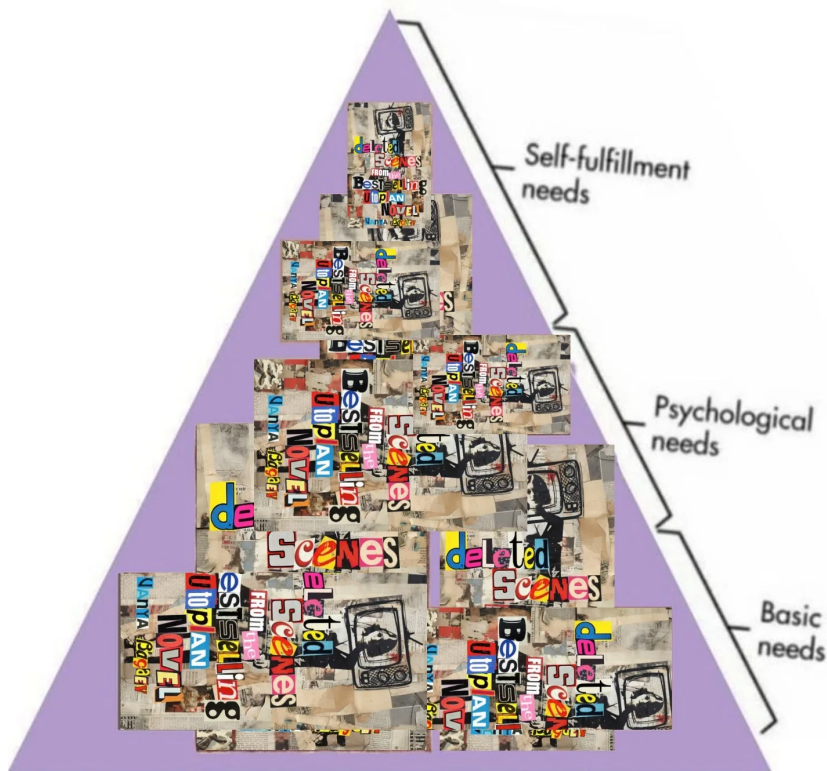
We all have our little 't's, which are the miniature traumas that happen to everyone in life, the embarrassing moments, the anguish and the bruises, those which are cumulatively harmful in their own right. Then we have big 'T' trauma, which maybe happens a few times, the scar that anyone from any life can

acquire that warps them for good and from which they may never recover, for better or worse. My big T was Tommy. This was for me the most crucial and memorable passage (and episode) from the book, one of those that I'll take with me. It is a moment that gives the book's title the second, symbolic meaning. It is also a moment at which for me the story ends and everything else after that becomes an epilogue, a necessary and poignant one that I loved reading, yet still an epilogue. It makes another last spin of the spiral back, balancing the tragedy with hope, and gives the book its satisfying closure.

Would I recommend it? Yes. Clancy's a master storyteller. You can see this in his shorter fiction at , and it's evident in his novel. Even if you don't find themes or setting compelling (I didn't, for example; at least not when I picked it up), you'd be absorbed by the story and the charm of its characters.

[The Big T Again Print Edition This — Read on Substack](#)

Re: "Deleted Scenes from the Bestselling Utopian Novel"



My “Deleted Scenes...” have been slowly but steadily attracting readership and reviews. Last month published a quite perceptive and thoughtful review by Benji Taylor where he describes my book as “genre-bending, mind-bending and very, very Russian,” unfolding in “a carnival of language, blurring the lines between dream and reality,” which all of course is pleasing to read because it’s exactly how I see it myself as well, even though it’s almost impossible for me to describe it properly. It’s always been either elusive — what is that I wrote? I envy writers who can do that easily (like Clancy!). I struggled with the back

cover blurb, and I struggle with pitching the book to others, and I struggle now with the next one when I think of how I should describe it to my readers. Hence sharing the reviews here has always seemed to me a great idea:

The dilemmas facing Bagaev's characters (and their thoughts) are familiar to any reader of dystopian fiction, but the darkly comic manner in which he explores them heightens the grotesque absurdity of life under the authoritarian wheel. You can [find and read the full review here](#).

Another one was written by a few months ago.

— [...] You know like (the thought uses air quotes) “this book was chaotic in the best way”. Explain that we felt the book was punchy and heavy at times, but it balanced it with dark humor really well. [...] [You can find it here](#). It is a fictionalised review so it's also a glimpse inside the book, some parts of it.

created [a review hub](#) for his novel “American Pleasure” — which is also on my reading list — and I thought I should really put it all together finally. [My book's page](#) already has a bunch of links to reviews and excerpts for them but lacks structure and presentation.

If you've bought my “Deleted Scenes” recently or not so recently, please post the pictures, quotes, spread the word anywhere in any way — it

would help immensely. There's no better marketing!

If you too want to write a review and publish it somewhere, I can help you getting hold of a copy, just DM me on Substack or send an email.

With that, thank you for making it to the end.

Now, I bow away!

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