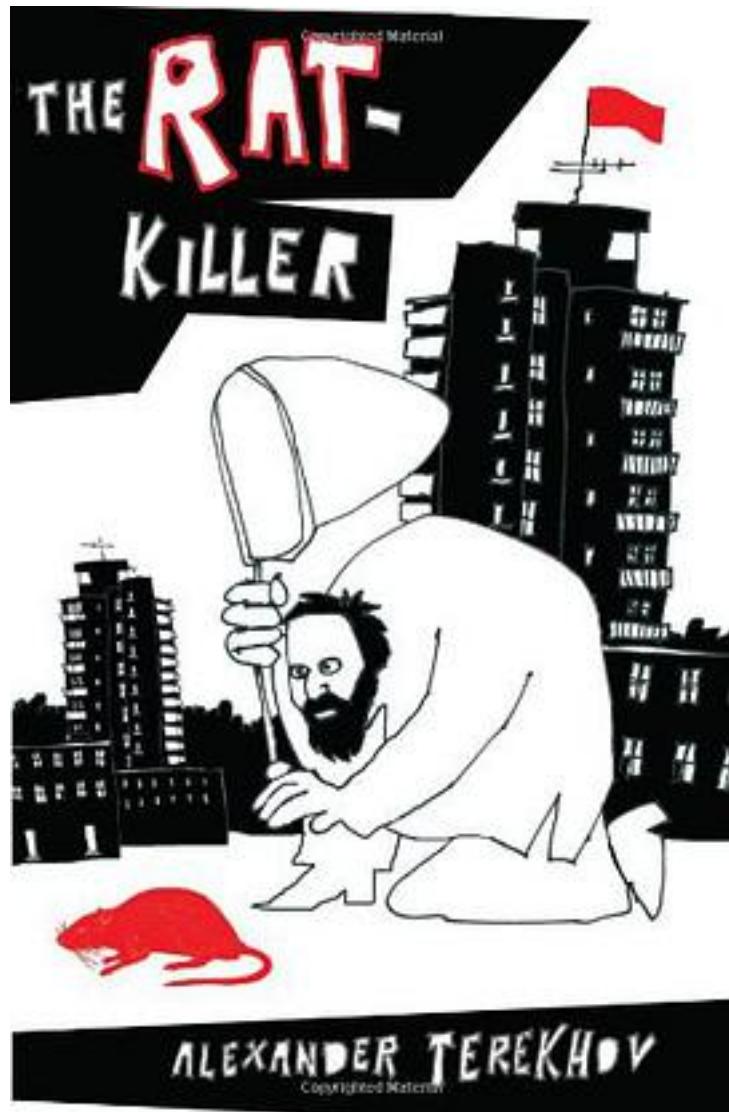


The Rat Killer



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出版者:

出版时间:2009-11

装帧:

isbn:9781846880537

Rats and human beings aren't that far apart from each other in "The Rat-Killer". As the political intrigue of phantasmagorical post-communist reality develops into nightmare, the greed, cunning and malice of the humans more and more resemble the behaviour of the large communities of destructive rodents, while the rats acquire more and more human features. Svetloyar is bidding to be included in the list of historical towns making up Russia's famous "golden Ring" around Moscow, a lucrative tourist route. However, aside from the problem that it has no history (having been entirely constructed during the Stalinist period), the place is over-run by rats, so two pest-controllers are summoned from Moscow. What follows is an astute interrogation of the nature of both humanity and history, as Terekhov subtly sets alongside the narrator's desire for the regional dictator's wife with his perpetual concern for the destruction of rats. Whilst clearly a novel of the classical Russian tradition, "The Rat-Killer" also incorporates the more experimental and satirical aesthetic of Soviet writers such as Bulgakov, and as the narrator's perception of reality becomes increasingly warped, so does our experience of the almost comically grotesque landscape around him.

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